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MARK EYLMER'S REVENGE.

VOL. II.



MARK EYLMER'S REVENGE.

BY

MRS. J. K. SPENDER,

AUTHOR OF

“ JOCELYN'S MISTAKE,” “ PARTED LIVES,”
“ HER OWN FAULT.”

&c. &c.

“ How would you be
If He, which is the top of judgment, should
But judge you as you are? O think on that;
And mercy then will breathe within your lips,
Like man new made.”

MEASURE FOR MEASURE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



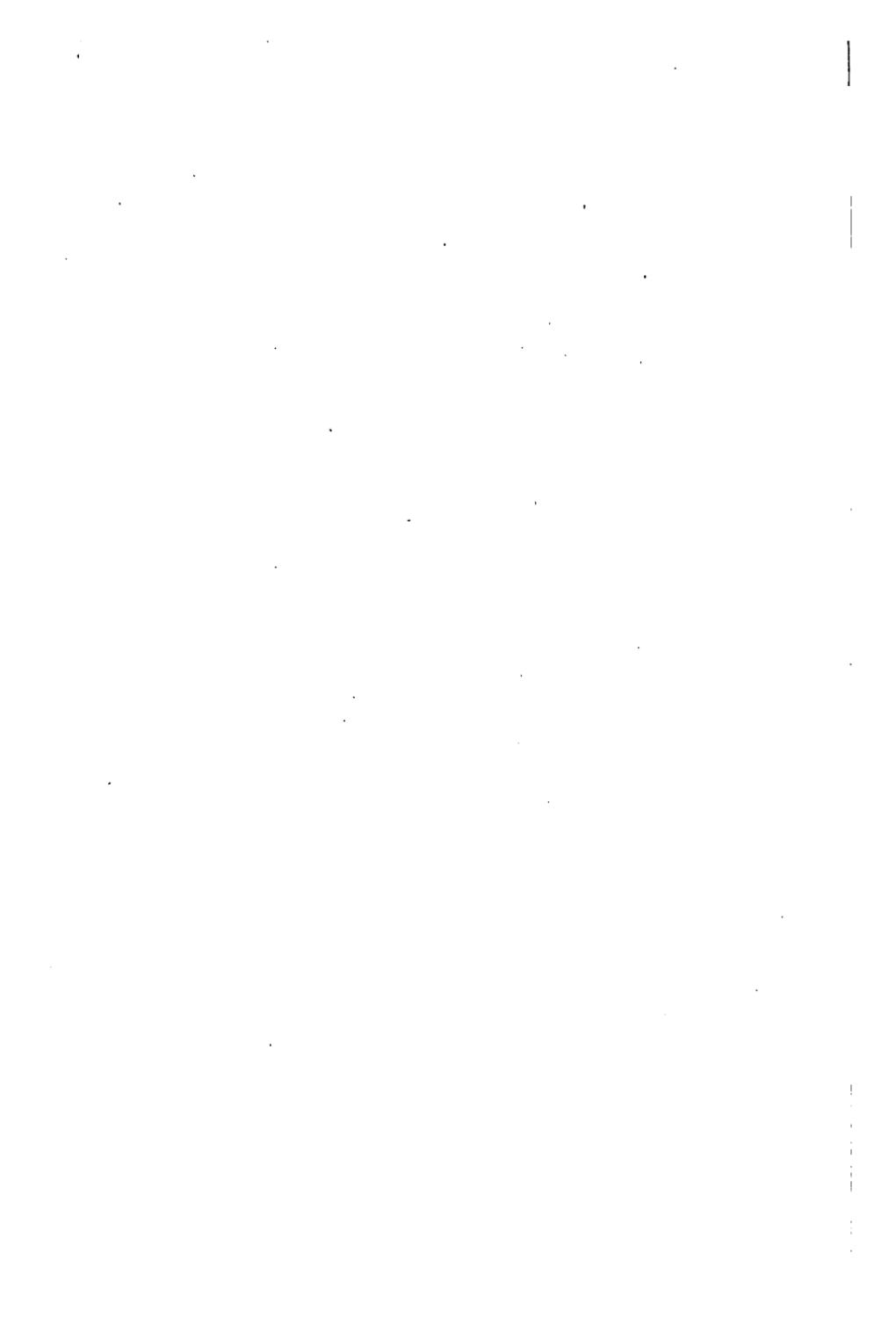
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MARK EYLMER'S REVENGE.

Book II. (*Continued.*)

CHAPTER XVI.

RANDAL STANTON was too self-indulgent to take a severe view of his own conduct, though he knew that there was a subtle, disguised under-current of emotion still warm in his heart, respecting the pretty creature he had saved.

He remembered how she looked at him, and yet he could easily forgive her for forgetting her maiden bashfulness under circumstances of such peril. He remembered also how he had spoken to her in words of encouraging tenderness. But the fact

of his so speaking had been the result of a surprise. It seemed as if circumstances had been beforehand with him, and as if the temptation which had lain in ambush, had suddenly tripped him up.

The beautiful girl who had made such a difference to his life in the wilds of Wales, ought to be, after all, to him—well—only the sister of the woman he was about to marry.

Yet he was but flesh and blood, and it seemed to him he would have been more than human, if he could forget Rosette with her hands clasped in that agony of self-abandonment. His memory was still haunted by the picture of her fair and delicate form, her wet drapery, and her long hair, and he became for the first time indulgent to all those myths of sea-nymphs, mermaids, and goddesses of the ocean, which, though they formerly might have kindled the imagination of a man like Mr. Gathorne, would only have furnished Randal Stanton with subjects for laughter.

"I thought I belonged to the age, but it seems I made a mistake. I have got infected with sentimentalism," he said to himself the following evening, when he visited at the cottage, and when Rosette trembled as she looked at him, though she had already regained her colour.

"She is not strong enough to bear the consequences of such a wetting," he said, in excuse for his over-politeness, as he went into the house to fetch a shawl for her, and spread it over her shoulders. He knew that what he said was irreconcilable with strict truth, and that Rosette's constitution was in reality very good. But he discovered that she had a little cough, and invented various small symptoms to substantiate his theory, and make it look probable even to his own conscience.

"It is much more likely that Harry will suffer from his violent exertion," said Maitland, a little bluntly. She had been busy all the day in making arrangements for her brother's comfort, and it seemed to

her rather hard that everyone took it for granted she had a constitution of iron. She was shivering and exhausted, though she would not have acknowledged it, and yet no one brought a shawl to put over *her* shoulders.

“Does he take me for a man like himself, that only Rosette is to be coddled?” she asked, with a sudden pang which was only natural. It was a very slight action, that bringing of the shawl; and yet, coupled with other circumstances, it wrung her heart in an indescribable way.

She told herself that she had known it all, she had already realised how Randal had slipped away from her and was gone. And yet the whole cruel truth seemed to break upon her in a way it had not done before; and through hours of fruitless struggle she asked herself that evening how it would be possible for her to bear seeing all the love that had been hers, lavished on another—how she could endure to live and witness it?

No one would have guessed it from her appearance. During the short time of Randal's visit she joined cheerfully in the conversation, and except for the flush on her face, and the unnatural brightness of her eyes, she might have seemed to be in no way disturbed by what had passed. But when the night came, it was a time of hot pillows and night-marish confusion of thought, with sleep a miserable delusion and a torment, and eyes wide open, staring into the darkness. In vain did she make strong-minded resolutions to be still with straightened limbs like a figure on a monumental brass. For an hour afterwards she rose with flushed face and dishevelled hair, to watch the silent mellow stars, burning softly in the broad dark arch overhead, trying to contemplate the future calmly and steadily. She had seen in the past a series of facts which left no room for illusion, and in consternation she was compelled to resign herself to those facts. The night was calm and serene. She

looked out at the distance, and her thoughts seemed to be flying away like captive birds, set free, towards the fields. She tried to persuade herself that she would soon get over these wild thoughts. But she would not have been human if she had not suffered acutely.

“A troubled heart,” she thought, “involves the whole universe in its griefs as if its fever would torment the tranquil soul of indifferent Nature, and its foolish passion be re-echoed by the tranquil stars! Strange vanity of all who suffer! Ought not I as a Christian to be superior to it?”

“Poor fellow, I cannot blame him if he only fancied he liked me,” was her next unselfish comment. “How thankful I am that he is bound by no promises to me, and that he cannot say *I* have woven meshes round him, to entangle his footsteps throughout the weary years! How women can keep men to their vows, when those vows have become empty and meaningless, and may lead them to miser-

able prevarications—is incredible to me!"

So comparatively easy was it to argue with stern common sense during the loneliness of the night. But when on the following morning, as soon as she could spare time, she wandered in one of her favourite walks near the cottage,—hoping that the fresh air might help to remove the feeling from which she suffered as if there were heavy weights on her eyelids—she had forgotten the reasoning of the previous night.

"Alas, it is all over, and I love him," she said to herself.

Different voices seemed to cry to her, "Expect nothing!" "Hope nothing!"

But in spite of them her sanguine disposition had its way.

"After all, I have probably exaggerated," she said to herself. "Rosette is so beautiful that it is perfectly natural for any man to *seem* to forget my existence in his gaze at her. But probably it was only seeming—why should he let her fascinations throw his mind off its

balance? It is not likely—it is absurd."

She was so deep in thought, wandering beneath the shade of the interwoven fir trees, with dead spikelets and dry cones strewn beneath the feathery ceiling, that she did not at first hear the sound of voices with which she was familiar, or see the figures of a man and a woman—the woman leaning on the man's arm—at a little distance from her, but partially screened by the tapering foliage, and the reddish trunks of the young firs. But when she *did* see, she drew back and shivered imperceptibly as she recognised the woman's dress, which was one of Rosette's morning wrappers of a pretty pale silver-grey, and knew the familiar figure of the man.

Her first impulse was for flight. But though the sight had cleared her senses, her body was suffering from the fatigue of the previous night. The beating of her heart suddenly became hubbub, and her limbs seemed to chain her to the spot. They were approaching her, and coming nearer to her; but she stood watching

them as if fascinated, calling to her aid a smile. She could not hear what they said, she had no intention of hearing. But when they stopped a little nearer the spot where she stood, screened from observation by one of the trees, she was struck by the alteration in Rosette's face. It wore an expression half rueful, half arch, which she had never seen in it before; and her eyes were brilliant with tears which were ready to fall. She was twisting a branch of jasmine between her fingers, as Randal spoke to her, looking wistfully in her face, and the flower seemed to have a bad time of it, as she answered in a timid and uncertain voice to the words which Randal addressed to her. Few and broken his words seemed to be, as if expressive of a feeling which could not be confined in the meshes of language, and Maitland groaned inwardly, and called herself a fool, as she remembered how eloquently he had been wont to address herself, with none of those hiatuses of speech, and none of that "disembodied

soul of feeling," the essence of which is intangible and unappreciable. It was impossible for her to tell what he was saying to Rosette, yet something irreparable seemed to have snapped in her heart, and she was no longer meek and self-restrained, as she had been on the evening before. She coloured hotly when she thought of the wrong which had been inflicted on her, and which, if it had been unintentional, was not less a wrong.

"It is all plain sailing now," she thought; when another voice, not her own, seemed to be speaking to her, and when after an interval of time, which could not be measured by what men call seconds, she found that no one was within sight, and she was again alone. "All plain sailing—no longer any doubt of what I have to do. He shall never understand what bitter pain he has caused me."

"He!"—She could have mocked at herself for recurring to the familiar pronoun. For "he" whom she had

credited with a heart and soul in her credulity—lo, it seemed he had no existence! The wound had been so suddenly inflicted, and had been cut as if with the knife of a skilful surgeon so mercifully deep that the excision was completed at once; but it seemed as if the pain of it would go on for ever, and as if, in the mutilation of her whole being, Faith and Hope had vanished, or were sinking to fear in her despondent heart.

It was overwhelming and unendurable, as all such sudden disillusionments are, and yet it was characteristic of Maitland that, with grave compressed lips and a toneless voice, she alone maintained the conversation that evening, even playing, to please her father, on the old worn-out piano, which she generally despised, flat tunes, jingled out of time—running her hands over the discoloured keys, as if she delighted in the jarring and jingling of the instrument.

“I wish you would leave off,” said

Rosette plaintively, after trying to bear the infliction with good temper; "I wish you would leave off; I have a little headache."

"Headache! and what have *I*?" thought her sister, with a touch of her involuntary sarcasm.

Could it be called a head-ache which was an indescribable feeling like that of a nail being bored through her forehead to her brain—with that other pain as if a knife had been turned in her *heart*?

CHAPTER XVII.

"IT was sharp and quickly over—let all misunderstanding between us be quickly over, too," she said, to herself, when after another conflict and attempt at self-repression on the following day, she prepared to do the one thing which it seemed to her remained to be done. Her soul felt dead, and the moisture of suffering stood on her forehead, but her step was as firm as her resolution.

"I am not going to act like a Brahmin or a Fakir," she reminded herself. "It shall not be said of me that by my own hand I dug a gulf between myself and all that I loved most

on earth. But the gulf has already been dug; and I have only to open his eyes as well as my own to the fact of its existence."

It was a windy morning for the month of August. But the poor girl could scarcely distinguish the soothings of the breeze and the rocking of the branches of the trees from the thunder which seemed to be going on in her own head—or what was worse than thunder—the ceaseless dull surging, like the waves of the sea.

Randal had been astonished by receiving a letter from her that morning, inviting him to meet her at a certain hour in the afternoon, near an avenue which was associated with memories of the past.

He scarcely understood the summons, for she had seemed to avoid him lately, and the opportunities for meeting her alone had become fewer and fewer. But he had accepted it at once.

"Maitland is less of a prude than

I took her for," he said wondering. "I thought she had more in common with that class of women who form the staple for old maids; kind and good, but passionless, intellectual and sweet—but unbeautiful." He had spoken without those "buts" a few months before.

The poor girl's task was a harder one than she expected it would be. For there lies at the foundation of every woman's being a mystery of weakness, as well as of power, which can all the less reveal itself to others, because she does not comprehend it herself.

On the gravel-path beyond the cottage, she heard a heavy step, and that revulsion of feeling swept over her while her heart sank. Still her voice was clear and firm.

"Let us go into the avenue," she said. He followed her. But it seemed at first as if the very sight of the old avenue, where he had first told her he loved her, would shake her resolution. The murmur

of the wind amongst the trees, which she began to hear plainly for the first time, recalled the old tones of his voice. She looked up at him gravely, and tried to speak; but her dry lips could hardly articulate a sound.

“What is the matter?” he asked, holding out his hand, which she took with a slackened grasp that ought to have spoken volumes. She gave an uneasy laugh, as she tried to rally herself; and she did not try in vain, for the stunned sensation in her head, and the sick, frightened feeling with which she had had to contend, were already passing away. Her resentment was returning with the cruel sense of injury, which made her feel as if it would have been better for death to have snatched her treasure, than for her to be unable to believe in its existence at all—to be compelled to live on, and to find it turned into clay. She could have spoken out in eloquent fiery words, and have taunted Randal with his ingratitude, his faithlessness, and indifference to her affection.

But she only said calmly, though in a subdued, half-muffled voice—

“Be kind to Rosette—be truer to her than you have been to me. I have come to tell you that I can very well spare you—and that—that—your engagement with her must be an open one. Do you suppose,” she added, with a faint smile, “that I shall not be able to support the sense of such a loss?”

At the first instant he pretended to misunderstand her, but her eyes seemed to sift him through and through. So much self-control confounded him. Was she made of marble, or of flesh and blood like himself?

“It was an hallucination—a madness—scarcely anything has happened for which you can blame me,” he stammered, as soon as he could find his voice; “I admired your sister’s beauty, but you can surely forgive me for that. If you ever really loved me, why do you not forgive it?”

Even then she did not reproach him for his shallow nature, but she wrenched her

hand suddenly away from his, and stood looking at him, as if she would take the measure of his moral stature.

"Remember the time," he continued pleadingly, "when I had not a thought but for *you*."

"I do remember it," she answered slowly, "and it is for that reason I repeat, 'Be constant to Rosette. Cease to lead your present idle life, and have some settled pursuit, some regular occupation. What is the good of talent, where resolution is wanting?'"

Her apparent coolness flurried him. She spoke to him like a friend who was about to be separated from him by an immeasurable gulf of absence.

"Those are big words," he said, trying to force a laugh; "but I tell you they are founded on a mere hallucination. You forget how much I owe you, and you seem to ignore the fact that we belong to each other."

"To begin with, you owe me nothing."

"Nothing?"

"No. I gave my heart to you by my free consent, and you have given it back to me—quite uninjured. It seems I made a very foolish mistake. But I was old enough to know what I was doing."

She said it impassively, without a touch of bitterness, and for once his soul thrilled with an impulse of true nobility.

"Do not say that again," he cried; "you are bound to me by the truest ties. In the sight of Heaven you should be my wife—you, and no other. Do not talk of breaking off the engagement; we belong to each other."

He was pleading earnestly in a truer key, with much of his old eagerness, and for the moment she trembled, and her heart throbbed almost to bursting.

At that moment she thought of how a child, cruel in its ignorance of pain, treats a butterfly which it has pierced with a pin through its fragile body, and which tries to flutter away to some solitary place to die. "Come back!" cries the thought-

less child ; "I have not looked at you enough!"

Was he treating her like this quivering insect, and studying her agonies ? The thought steeled her against him, and she said,

"There never was any engagement, I thank God there was not. I belong to you not at all. Undeceive yourself at once. We shall have no more to do with each other in the future, than if we were ships passing each other at sea."

He threw up his arms in despair like a man who would call Heaven to witness that he was not so much to blame as she thought him, and then sat down on one of the wooden benches, on which they had sometimes rested in that avenue ; white to the very lips.

"I do not blame you," she added more gently ; "God knows I do not wish to cast too much blame on anyone, but if you think *I* have any claim on you, I restore your freedom to you at once. As for me, do not reproach yourself. Do not

think you have done me any lasting injury, for if the remembrance of our past love proves difficult to efface, I will pray to be able to forget it."

He tried to speak. But she interrupted him quietly ; " Look at this ring, you insisted on giving it to me. But I—I have brought it back to you. You have nothing to tell me, and nothing to deny. I know all about it. I do not ask you why you had not the candour to come to me honestly and tell me the truth, without leaving me to find it out for myself. Perhaps you had not the courage. But it makes little difference now. The courage, if you like to put it so, is mine. And now I have only one thing to ask of you. Do not deceive *her*, as you have deceived me. Your future is before you, do not destroy it."

He stood before her, not noticing the ring which she dropped at his feet; he stretched out his arms, and once again he attempted to speak. Once more her resolution was shaken, her limbs felt as if they would

bear her no longer. Her heart cried for refuge, but yet again, like a desperate general who burns the ships which might restore him to harbour in safety, in order that his half-hearted soldiers may be driven to victory, she cut away from herself all chances of retreat.

“*Go!*” she cried authoritatively, almost sternly, in a voice which was still perfectly steady. “*Go, I leave you free.*”

He obeyed her at last, but at the sound of his retreating footsteps her manner instantly altered. The woman's heart, kept in check by the strength of her will, was having its vengeance on the spirit, the exhausted brain succumbed, and hot tears of human anguish fell scaldingly down her cheeks.

“I love him no more, but my heart is broken,” she said, as she fell on the seat which he had occupied a few moments before.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ON the same day that Maitland parted from Randal in the avenue, Mr. Gathorne had a visit from James Moorcroft. He had not seen much of Moorcroft lately, and the two men never had much in common. But the latter had been touched by the old man's changed appearance, by the increased irritability of his manner, and had more than one suspicion that these symptoms were caused by the unaccountable persecution of some relentless enemy.

"He won't care about seeing me. Perhaps he will even refuse himself to me, as he has often done before; but

things can't go on as they are at present. I have good reasons for knowing that he is deeply in debt, and for the sake of his children it will be better to make one effort to help him. I won't blink a thing, because it is unpleasant," said the good man, constraining himself to perform an unpleasant duty, as he knocked determinately at the door of the cottage.

A voice said, "Come in," and going into the room unannounced, he saw Mr. Gathorne, who had cast off the mask in the absence of his children, seated by the table, his grey head resting on his arms, and with an expression of such tragic misery in his face that it reminded Moorcroft of Sir Joshua Reynolds' portrait of Ugolino.

His first impulse was to retreat, but the next was to plunge "in medias res."

"Will you allow me to say a word to you in private?" he asked.

Mr. Gathorne's irritability was instantly

roused. "Twenty words," he answered grimly; "on one condition."

"Which?"

"I will promise to hear anything unpalatable from you—though no man hates preaching more than I do, if you do not mean to ask me for my daughter."

Moorcroft understood. He did not before know that his manner had betrayed him to the father who would not be able to live without the earnings of the daughter.

But the coarseness and suddenness, as well as the coldness and hardness of the restriction, roused his natural pride, and he retorted angrily,

"If I love your daughter, and I *have* loved her ever since she came to Llandyffryn, at least my love does not hurt her. She does not know of it, and you will not betray my secret. It is very unlikely I shall ever ask you for her; I am not only too old to be her husband, but I am poor, and therefore I have learnt to moderate my desires."

Mr. Gathorne's manner altered.

" You think me a selfish brute," he said, as if he had suddenly become conscious that he had ventured too far. " But my eldest girl is everything to me; she is the Cordelia of my old age. Now, if it were the younger one, she is sure to marry. But she must marry a rich man—it ought to be a nobleman. Rosette has been accustomed to keep up a style and position fitting to her beauty, and she ought to have somebody to supply her with the luxuries to which she has been used. But when she is married," he added, mauldering on, " and when she goes away with her husband, as she went before, her sister will remain here. I console myself with that recollection; it fortifies my courage. Maitland is intelligent, she is healthy, she would be a treasure to any man; but she is not easy to please. She is contented, she is useful, she is happy as she is. Why disturb that present happiness for an uncertain future?"

" If she is happy *you* are not," answered

James Moorcroft, wondering, as he had often wondered before, whether the brain of the foolish speaker were not really affected, and trying to change a conversation which had become intolerable to him ; “ you have enemies who are trying to spread reports which are detrimental to your character ; you have secret anxieties, you have debts—I came here to ask you to let me help you.”

George Gathorne looked furtively at him from beneath his bushy eyebrows, with a sudden, keen, searching glance which Moorcroft bore without flinching. Then lowering his eyelids, he answered evasively,

“ Yes ; it is true that I have enemies—people who seek to do me mischief. True, also, that in spite of living simply as I do—for them, them only, my children, I have scarcely anything to depend upon. And yet—I hold up my head in spite of it. I do not even complain of it, for such is the world. If anything in our appearance were to make a display of misery, every-

one would turn his head away from us. No one would hold out his hand to us."

"Say no more about it," he continued, as Moorcroft remained silent, and he flattered himself that he had put an extinguisher on his curiosity. "We are poor, and poverty is always a sort of exile. Every day my dignity as a father, and my children's self-respect, may be cruelly wounded, but it is our destiny, and we will submit to it."

"I object to the word 'destiny,' it has a heathenish sound," said Moorcroft cheerily.

"You will find yourself landed in a greater difficulty if you accuse Providence of loading its innocent creatures with evils," answered Mr. Gathorne grimly.

"Query—innocent? I believe trials are best borne when they are looked upon as a merciful system of education, adapted to imperfect creatures by a loving Father."

"Of course it is your office to talk like that," said Mr. Gathorne, rising, as if to dismiss his visitor; "I do not interfere with you; I am not combative. But experience has taught me that these things are valueless when they are tested."

"The time of tests is not yet over," said Moorcroft gently, also rising as he spoke; "and if in anything I can be of use to you in the future, let me entreat of you to count on me. I am not rich, as I told you honestly, but I may be able to lend you a little out of my moderate income, and if——"

"Thank you," said Mr. Gathorne, laughing a little nervous, egotistical laugh. "But as you seem to be so remarkably well-informed about my affairs, I may, perhaps, remind you that my son is likely to have a good appointment abroad, and that my daughter, considering she is a woman, has been tolerably successful with her pen. Talent is sometimes hereditary, they say; and my *own* brain is not quite,

perhaps, worn out as yet. It still contains the due proportions of carbon, oxygen, and hydrogen, like all other brains, and it used to have plenty of phosphorus, but lately it seems to me it's the phosphorus it wants," he added, trying to be jocose, and putting his hand to his head.

"Perhaps my information was incorrect. At any rate, if he has so large a sum of money to supply in so short a time, his pride enables him to carry his anxieties off better than I should have thought possible. Or is it, as I always imagined, that he has much of the Irishman in his temperament, and can put off thinking of the evil day?" thought the curate, as he walked home disappointed. Then he suddenly remembered the expression of Mr. Gathorne's face when he had taken him by surprise, and was more puzzled than ever.

A few days afterwards came the startling news of Rosette's engagement to Randal Stanton, and for a short time Mr. Gathorne was a good deal occupied with the

son-in-law, who seemed to have fallen, as he predicted, from the clouds for his younger daughter, though he was not so really startled as he thought it necessary to appear to be.

And if, in the weeks that followed, Maitland suffered, as it was natural for her to do, from a loss of appetite and a want of her natural sleep, there was nothing in her outward manner to betray the fact that she had to fight through a bad pass alone.

“After all,” she said to herself, when she nerved herself to bear up as usual, “I had nothing to lose but my illusions—hopes which really went for nothing. I am no worse off than I was before.”

She reminded herself, with a faint smile, that she had simply loved an *eidolon*, which had no existence. And though the backbone seemed at first to have gone out of her life, and though it seemed to her that the good things were never to fall to her share, yet the sweet affectionateness of her nature helped her

to rally in the crisis. For jealousy seemed to be a monstrosity with a candid nature like Maitland's. And she could not fail to win a blessing in her righteous endeavour to overcome her distaste to the simple food, plainly served, which had contented her in her former life, and in the continual attempts which she made to get back to her previous condition, and to remind herself of the fact, that happiness still remained for her in the happiness of others—in the love of God through the love of her neighbour. More than ever she became the "grandmother," or the good fairy godmother, whose maternal affections were readily bestowed on the whole human race. And first of all there was Rosette to be thought of, and to be congratulated like a daughter, though Rosette proved to be disappointing as usual, saying, in a matter-of-fact way—

"Well, he doesn't actually displease me. He is too handsome for a man, it would be quite enough for any man to have such fine teeth as he has, without adding the

fine features ; 'they are sure to make him conceited. But, you see, I must marry *somebody*, and there is certainly not an unlimited choice at Llandyffryn. And then there is one decided advantage : he is an orphan, and I shall be spared the trouble of being bothered by a mother-in-law."

Maitland's embrace relaxed. Rosette's utter want of sentiment for the first time appalled her, and she began to recognise the fact that there was something wanting in her nature.

" Well, what are you staring at ?" said the incorrigible Rosette, with her merriest laugh. " Did you expect me to catch the complaint of love as if I were catching scarlet fever ? That sort of feeling cannot be forced."

" Have you ever thought, dear, that you may do a cruel wrong to any man by promising to marry him when ' that sort of feeling,' as you call it, cannot be forced ?"

" I have not got it in me."

“Then do anything rather than marry.”

“If you think you are amusing here in the wilds of Wales, you make a great mistake,” said the offended Fairy, losing all patience. “Why, dear me, I have hardly settled down here, and I hear nothing all round but sermons and moralizing.”

Maitland said no more, but her heart felt, as the French say, *serré*, and it was a relief to her after this to be able to expend something of that warm affection which Rosette in her present volatile mood so little appreciated, on her more sympathetic brother.

For Harry managed to come to them for one more day before sailing for India, and he and his manhood had a hard tussle for it in taking leave of Maitland.

“You are not only my sister; you are sister and brother, and—near as you are to my own age—you have supplied the lack of a mother,” he said; with

an unusual burst of eloquence, during that last interview; when he also rattled on with any nonsense that came, to hide what the parting really cost him.

"It seems a little hard," he acknowledged at last, "to be compelled to expatriate myself in this fashion, so much as I care for you all; to have to leave *you* with your present anxieties, and father with so many difficulties; and to be forced to go beyond the seas with no one to look after you in my absence."

"Then why do you go?" asked Maitland involuntarily, unable to hide how she too clung to this last useful male prop of the family.

"Go—go—why I would go to Australia, to Siberia—anywhere—willingly—as many a better fellow has gone before me."

"And why?" repeated Maitland, with a full heart, though she knew what the answer was before he gave it her.

“Because men are wanted there, whilst they are super-abundant here. Because there, there will be a hundred chances for me, and here there are a million against me.”

She was silent; and he tried to laugh in his boyish fashion, saying,

“Don’t be afraid. *My* head isn’t like father’s—twenty-two inches in circumference—isn’t that the maximum he is always boasting about, reminding us that Cuvier and Napoleon had both of them huge craniums. If I put on the governor’s hat, it slides over my eyes. But *my* brain has the phosphorus which he says his has not. It’s the money we want, and the money I must make by hook or by crook. Now if I could only invent an extract of meat without any meat in it, and get the title of Baron,—or a hair-wash, an eau-des-fées which would pretend not to be a dye—a freckle lotion, quack medicine, or a new receipt for blacking,—perhaps I shouldn’t have to go to India! But

as it is I must go, and make my fortune by hard plodding."

"And spend it on *us* when it is made?"

"Not necessarily," he answered; "I shall keep some sugarplums for myself. Father and Steenie must come to *me*—and when I have made the £. s. d. we will go together and see other places, that has always been my dream. I mean to make a man of Steenie—that is part of my programme. We will stop in Egypt and consult the Sphinx. We will question the Pyramids, and then by and by when I have leave, we will look at all the capitals of Europe. Father shall write poetry about them, and I will study manners and races—whilst as for Steenie,—well Steenie shall be taken to breathe the air of the Swiss mountains—to visit the Pyrenees—to—"

"Stop, stop, you will be out of breath! Too much phosphorus by half! It reminds me of the milkmaid and the pot of milk.

You were always a good boy when you were little, sharing your chocolates with other people. But it seems to me it is rather too bad to ignore *me* in this fine programme. I too should like to see Switzerland," said Maitland, trying to laugh.

"Oh *you*—you will marry Stanton as soon as father can spare you. I think I know all about it," explained Harry with an air of mock wisdom. "Well, what have I said now?" he cried pulling himself up at the sight of the floods of scarlet which suddenly dyed Maitland's face and neck, "I seem always to be hitting the wrong nail on the head; always to be riding roughshod over somebody's feelings. I cannot surely have made a mistake. Are—*are* you not going to marry Stanton? I thought his manner was unmistakeable."

"Silly boy, you forget Rosette, and you have not heard the news. As if anybody could look at me when Rosette was with us!"

"What, Polly engaged to Stanton! You don't mean it—what nonsense! It seems to me there must be a bad sort of treason somewhere," he said out loud, as his mind flashed over connected memories. "Can it be possible that Polly's cowardice recommended her to Stanton? I thought it was a case of "sauve qui peut" that day in the water."

"Don't bring up that old story, and don't call her Polly, you know she doesn't like it."

"And why not? She was christened Mary as well as Rosetta, which always reminds me of the 'Rosetta stone,' and I should like just to ask you if an honest English Christian name isn't fifty times better than all the Rosettes or 'Fairys' or other affected nicknames which may go down with people who write poetry. *We*, at least, don't take to rhyming, and there is no reason in the world why we should make Polly out to be without a soul! Why, her name seems to be fatal to her.

She has about as much feeling as a sprite ; and if father wanted to model her after one of those soulless beings, he had better have called her Undine, I should think, at once ; for Undine, if I remember rightly, had some chance of getting a soul, which Titania had not."

"Don't be so vehement. How has Rosette harmed you ?"

"I don't say she has harmed *me*, but I say her coming here was ill-omened. She put us out of our usual way, I can't exactly say how. But after the first flare-up was over, things were more flat than when she came. Her spirits seemed to die away in a sort of fashion like dull embers. And then, just because she wanted something to amuse her, she fixed upon Stanton."

"All theory, Harry—no facts ; you are building your theories on false inferences ; they are unfair ones. First of all you must remember that Rosette only returned to her natural home. Where else could she go ? it was surely not *her*

fault if Mr. Stanton fell in love with her."

"It's the rummiest thing I ever heard of," he said, growing vernacular in his excitement. "Why, I had positively imagined that Stanton was devoted to *you*."

"We imagine a good many things for which there is not the slightest foundation, *I* have no idea of marrying,"

"Oh, that's all gammon you know; but I don't mean to interfere about it, if you like to say so. To contradict a woman would be too much bother."

"Sit down, Harry; you will frighten me if you mean to repeat this nonsense. Why, you silly boy, you used to have plenty of common-sense, and now you have been listening to some of the ordinary village gossip. *I wonder* you listened to it," she said, trying to be angry.

"Hold hard a bit. Who said I listened to gossip? I don't at all admit that; but I suppose I may draw my inferences for myself. If you were to talk till the

Millennium, you'd never convince me that before Polly came, there was nothing between you and our fine young Squire, though I never admired him. I never said I did, though I haven't the cheek to put myself in competition with such an elegant swell. He's not one of my sort. And as to *your* marrying him! Why, after all, of course I was mad to think of it. He's not fit to marry a girl like *you*. Yet," he added, after pondering a few moments, "you understand these things a precious deal better than I do, but I don't like the idea of your being an old maid—an angel of passive self-denial. I don't at all like it for you."

"You are an impertinent boy," she said, with a little smile. "Remember the vast distinction between 'old maids' and 'maiden ladies.'"

"I don't understand these fine distinctions; but I begin to make up my mind to one thing, that if *I* ever marry, it shall be a country girl, with no city nonsense about her; perfect health,

brown hair, fresh colour, just the opposite to Polly," added the indignant brother, who having thus delivered himself of all that was in his mind, plunged up the cottage stairs four steps at a time, and afterwards with the usual inconsistency of young men, said nothing to the delinquent.

The conversation added to Maitland's difficulties, and after Harry's absence—when he wrote that it was the most absurd thing in the world that examination—as if quoting a lot of things and making a general cram of everything, could help a fellow to know much about our Indian Empire—she became more dejected than she had been before. Everything seemed to be altered. Even Mr. Moorcroft avoided her, so that she scarcely ever now met him when she visited her school.

The change of season, from Summer to Autumn, was always remarkable at Llandyffryn. And already early in the month of October, the glorious Summer,

with its lost illusions, seemed to have passed away. The ash-trees and the chestnuts were beginning to shed their leaves, and the wild flowers, in which Maitland delighted, had almost entirely disappeared, the rich-coloured heather, the harebell, the rag-wort, the scabious, or the briony with its bright berries, only lingering as mementoes of the magnificent Summer weather.

Maitland was bound on one of her missions of mercy on one of these dull October afternoons when the sky was gloomy and grey, and when the rain was patterning downwards with a weary monotonous sound. She was ashamed of herself for feeling miserable, but it seemed to be a time for dismal presentiments, for weird associations, and for a sad consciousness of the nearness of physical decay. Drip, drip, went the rain on the already sodden grass; but the girl, wrapped in her waterproof cloak, took little or no notice of it, opposing herself to the slanting drops, and not even taking

the trouble to hold up an umbrella. The listless expression of the face, and the dull pallor about the lips, as she walked on gazing at the grey-green sea—where, on this special evening there were none of the glowing hues or fiery colours of sunset, but only a mystic silent look about the west, chiming in with her own humour, in which the past was sad, the future perplexing, and thought an all-absorbing companion, attracted the attention of a passer-by, who was also struggling with the rain. He stopped, involuntarily arrested by it, and said to himself with a sudden pang,

“ She must have gone through tortures, or she would not look like this.”

He held out his hand, but she did not notice it; she had been wounded by his neglect, the absence of her usual talks with him, and his supposed avoidance of her.

I need not say that Moorcroft had not intended to avoid her. But he, who had been accustomed to live with his inward

powers duly balanced, was allowing himself time to recover that balance. He was not what is popularly called a romantic man. He tried not to look at things in their fleeting, exaggerated aspect, but only in that aspect which was substantial and real. And after his interview with Mr. Gathorne, he had said to himself that if there was the secret of a hopeless love in his heart—a pure and honourable love for one of God's creatures—he had yet the power to be silent about it, and to determine that the object of it should never even guess at it, if it were likely to do her harm. It was not so hard for him, as it might have been for a man differently constituted, to determine that this love should remain unsuspected by the woman he loved, and to know that he might have to be constantly near Maitland, yet as solitary in her company as if he had been exiled.

By her side, and yet *outside*, and that for year after year, not daring to ask for anything, and not hoping to receive. He

had been steeling himself to bear this, feeling sure that in a few weeks the sight of the girl who was so good and tender, and who could go on under disappointment quietly fulfilling her daily duties, would do him good rather than depress him. And he only asked for small things.

But the look of Maitland's altered face affected him suddenly in a manner he could not have anticipated.

"Poor thing, she has too many burdens to bear. Other people's crosses are laid upon her, as well as her own, and I have not tried to help her," he thought as he watched her. He might well have said so had he known of her sleepless nights, or of the anxious days, which she had had for years past, when she had eaten poor food, and toiled as hard as a hireling for the sake of others. Never before had she seemed to him to be in a condition from which she required rousing, but now, though the muscles of his face felt stiff, so that he could not smile, and could hardly speak, he determined to speak to her

encouragingly, if by any means he might wake her out of this lethargy, which reminded him of the drowsiness caused by a protracted watch.

"You have not been writing anything lately," he said cheerily to her; "I have been looking in vain for your 'nom de plume.'"

"No," she answered, "I have been translating. I have lost the power of doing other things. I wonder I ever thought I had such a power. I cannot even speak to the boys. I have turned into a dumb spirit—a weak, contemptible dreamer, I think sometimes."

He was no stranger to her character, and knew that this phase of morbid conscientiousness was, so to speak, unnatural to her.

"You make a mistake," he answered cheerily. "You feel your brother's absence just now, and have had a good deal to try you lately. But you have *not* lost your power. You have plenty of influence; do not be afraid of using it. The

future is before you, and when you take heart again, your courage, your talent—for you *have* talent, you have almost genius—will enable you to be as useful as you were before. And you *must* use the good gifts which God has given you. I need not remind you that you have much to do."

She shook her head, and he continued,

"I often lost heart in the same way when I was younger, and when I had stronger causes for so reasoning than you appear to have. It seemed to me that the good things of life were not to come to *me*, that they were all given to my fellows, and that I was passed by and had been doomed to fail in everything. But then a voice reminded me that it is not those who *seem* to have lost in the race who are prevented from most truly winning, and I struck out again determinately for the goal."

There was nothing of self-pity or wounded pride in his explanation; but she

appreciated the motive which made him tell her of his failures.

She said involuntarily, with a wish to turn the conversation from herself,

“ *Your* life has been a hard one.”

“ What makes you think that mine has been an exceptionally hard life ? ” he answered smiling ; as if it were a matter of no consequence. “ We do not yet know what is hard or what is not—we only see a little bit of the puzzle. It is in our nights as well as our days, and in the darkness as well as the light, that we are told to bless the Lord—there must be *some* need for the pain that is in every existence.”

He was silent again, from his very desire to help her, though in his heart he commended her to the merciful care of Him who empties hearts and hands on earth that He may make them richer and fuller in the life which endures for ever. He knew how difficult it was to speak to her just at this crisis, for he himself had known something of that “ frantic hiding ” of the human soul, when it shrinks from the

touch of a friend who would venture to probe its sore, and turns away from all companionship as if it were an intrusion, keeping silence till God Himself shall comfort it.

But after a few moments he said anxiously, "You are going to be ill."

"No," she said; I am not going to be ill. I have been ailing for some time, but there is nothing exactly the matter with me—I have no disease."

He ventured again,

"You are not old enough to know anything of the sadness which should only come with advancing years."

And then she answered, almost sharply for her, "How do you know that I am sad. Who has been talking to you about me?"

He was silent again, for he could not tell her how one evening a little while before, when he had quietly opened the church door—which had been kept unlocked lately on week days—he had seen

her, when she did not know that any one was near her, on her knees, weeping and praying, with sobs which seemed as if they would tear her in pieces. He had withdrawn again, as quietly as he had come in, glad that the "House of God" should be a retreat for the heavy-laden—a retreat in which the weary might be refreshed, as by an interval of sleep, for the work which they had again to take up in daily life. For he knew that the answer to those prayers would come, that the blessing would be poured into the heart that was kept open for it, and that though the answer at present might be only "Hush!" it was "like a father's hush soothing the child back into strength and patience." He only answered gently,

"Your face is sad, and was particularly sad just now, when you had that far-away look as if you were watching the sea. But I do not believe in anyone remaining sad for any length of time, who attempts to imitate that Love which is thoroughly

unselfish, and which the best of us can only follow at a great distance."

She had no intention of confiding in anyone. She was not a woman to ask for help. But she answered him with one of the smiles which may be recorded in God's Book of Remembrance.

"I should be miserable, indeed, if I did not believe in *that* Love."

CHAPTER XIX.

A BOUT a month afterwards, the last flowers had disappeared at Llandyfrynn, and the ferns had all turned brown. Fogs became more frequent, and the pools were occasionally covered with a thin coating like glass. In another week or two the cattle were gathered under sheds, and the women and children in the cottages were crowding over peat fires. For a stealthy frost was already creeping on like an advancing enemy, and tightening its chains round the unconscious earth. And soon the breath of the

cottagers froze on the window-panes, and the birds hopped about disconsolately in search of berries. The sunshine when it appeared was paler and paler, and the evening fogs were thicker than before. A few flakes of snow fell day after day—snow which resembled sleet—soon turning into rain, and melting as it fell beneath the feet of the passers by.

And next a cold cutting wind began to sweep between the mountain gorges; the atmosphere seemed to thicken, and the pine trees groaned as if they were smitten by the fierceness of the blast. Then on one November morning when Rosette, a good deal frightened, ventured to peep out at the dreary prospect, the fir-trees and the mountains were covered with a sprinkling of white powder, and there was a mournful look of immensity in the solitary ravines. The size of everything seemed to be magnified beneath the dull grey dome of the sky, and the atmosphere had a curious fluffy appearance.

“What does it mean? I never saw anything look so awful!” she said, appealing to her sister with a terrified look.

Maitland answered her with one of the smiles which had become unusual with her of late, displaying the rarely-shown dimples on her cheeks;

“It means,” she said, “that we shall soon be blockaded, and have to find resources ourselves. It has only been playing at snow before, but now it is in earnest. The muffling snow is coming upon us, and we must make the best of it.”

And before evening the prophecy was fulfilled; for the snow began to fall in opaque and gigantic flakes, accumulating as it fell, obliterating all land-marks, and drifting so in places that in some of the valleys it soon reached to the height of a man. All sound of life ceased for a few days in the village, and then some of the sturdier labourers hollowed out pathways reaching from house to house; and the Llandyffryn people resigned them-

selves to wait through the monotonous days of Winter for the returning Spring.

It was a waiting which tested character, and drove Rosette to desperation; though Maitland smiled serenely as before, and looked like her quiet, unremarkable self. For however Rosette dressed her beautiful hair, and with whatever costumes she decorated her person, there was no one now to notice the pretty facial curves, or the graceful contours of her figure. Even Randal, who came occasionally to see her when the pathways were not blocked, but who, for reasons of his own, was a little shy of coming, neglected to pay her graceful compliments. And Rosette, after scorning him for forgetting to offer the accustomed incense at her shrine, resigned herself to the inevitable, and finding it impossible to wear her evening costumes of billowy white muslin, was thankful enough to shelter herself from the piercing cold in a dress of thick serge, which

Maitland's skilful fingers manufactured for her.

“If I had only some furs,” would be her cry on one occasion, in a plaintive, aggrieved tone of voice, which no one had heard from her before; and then on another she would say, with a shiver like the little terrified birds who crept supperless away to rest—

“It makes me think of death.”

“And must we not *all* think of the end of this life sometimes? It ought not to be terrible; quite the contrary. ‘They rest from their labours,’ and ‘He shall wipe away all tears from their eyes,’ ” quoted Maitland, who had been thinking more than ever lately of the inheritance incorruptible that fadeth not away, and of the rest which would come when the burden and heat of the day would be over, and there would be peaceful security in the Everlasting arms. She spoke in a low voice, with one of those looks which lit up her face as if it had been an alabaster lamp, and which in past times had

made critics say of her that she had points of beauty in expression rather than in feature.

“ Oh, that is all understood, but I suppose I am like most people. We have nothing to do with the next world; we don’t any of us think of it more than we can help.”

“ But we must think of it sometimes, and I think we have a great deal to do with it.”

“ When people go to a funeral, for instance. But I shall never go to a funeral. I would rather run to the furthest corner of the earth.”

“ To find the same shadows *there*, if they *are* shadows,” persisted Maitland, gravely, “ but some day you may take quite the opposite view of the case. You may be one of the many people whom nothing can comfort but the prospect of a future life. Ah! if they were only mortal, there are times when they would feel as if they could not bear it.”

To which Fairy answered with her fa-

vourite complaint, tapping her pretty foot impatiently on the floor :

“ You are not at all amusing. You will always indulge in remarks of such an abstruse nature that I can’t pretend to follow you. But I tell you most people don’t like it. If you only knew how *men* speak of a set of feminine thinkers who pretend to an intimate acquaintance with all things. But it is of no use for you to try to argue with *me*. I can’t argue about anything, and don’t want to be taught ‘ dialectics.’ ”

Maitland smiled—a patient, resigned smile—at the little move with which Rosette pronounced the last word. “ You use long words,” she said, “ which mean nothing; and you will never let me be frank with you, and tell you what I think.”

But she had long ceased to be at all hurt by the queer attempts at little sallies of droll humour, very far from the mark, in which Rosette occasionally indulged at her expense. The only result, as she well

knew, of trying to argue with her sister, was to make her dart away and leave her, because she was not sufficiently "amusing." Leave her to that perfect solitude, which was, after all, her best curative in this crisis of her life, for she was winning a healthy breathing-space during this long monotonous Winter, which enabled her to grapple with any remaining soreness—any sense of disappointment, as she would have grasped a nettle. The pain which had been so sharp, and yet so quickly over, still lingered on occasionally in the tones of her voice, and her heart still sometimes bled, making her feel as if she were orphaned in her innermost soul.

But peace was returning to her by slow degrees. The pallor was passing from her face, the soft lustre was returning to her eyes, and the eager passionate ring, with which she had ever pleaded against all vileness, all falsity, and crookedness, was coming back in its natural way to her voice. She no longer felt as if she were

estranged from her work, for all her noblest emotions were again beginning to stir her, not, indeed, strongly at first, but feebly and constrainedly, like the flowing of a river under ice.

“Better,” thought James Moorcroft, as he watched Maitland, with the warmth returning to his own heart. “Better to be amongst the foolish in this world, who go to the wall, and run the chance of being betrayed, than among the wise, who lose all their trust and faith in human nature.”

Not that he attempted to give her any more advice. God, he reflected, did not keep his children in the cradle for ever, but was teaching them by degrees in his own good way, and though some were borne as with eagle’s wings over their troubles, whilst others stumbled on the road from dark Gethsemanes, leaving stains from their life-blood on the way, yet the path was always tending upwards. Moorcroft could trust her to this teaching. Looking back, in a calmer mood on his

last conversation with Maitland, he reproached himself for the safe platitudes which he had uttered with such unction, and still more for the unintended flattery which must have jarred on her sensibility. Her face had *then* been so full of acute and utter pain that the sight of it had unmanned him. But now that it had regained its Madonna-like look, and something of its sweet, benevolent expression, he felt as if he could learn from her the lesson of patience and resignation.

“There are some things that are worth waiting for;” he thought; “and my time is not yet.”

But as December waned into January, whilst the snow still lay crisply on the long grass, and daintily fringed the edges of the fir trees, and as January in its turn melted into February, with little to mark the course of weeks but the changes from snow to a partial thaw or frost, and then from frost again to snow, the imprisonment and monotony told more

and more on Rosette's spirits. For a time the two sister's seemed so entirely to have changed places that it would have been difficult for a passing visitor to have guessed which was the one who was loved, cherished, and spared, and which the one doomed to silent endurance.

In the days when, with the air of ennui which betrayed the unoccupied woman, Rosette curled herself up like a dormouse, or lounged discontentedly by the fire, she seemed to derive little pleasure from the fact that she was idolized. When matters were worse than usual, she would dispatch tiny little cocked-hat notes, written in grammar which betrayed crass ignorance, to demand Randal's instant presence, with the confession that she could hardly live through her present surroundings, and that—in a word—she was bored to death. A confession, it *did* sometimes occur to him, of immeasurable inferiority, when—in answer to the tyrannical summons,—he

made all haste to his betrothed, and found her sitting with her hands before her, lamenting her hard fate, while the elder sister with the touch of genius that was in her, would be starting fresh subjects of conversation, or relating amusing anecdotes, only to be rewarded by a little mock bow from Rosette, or perhaps the unnecessarily caustic observation,

“What a wonderful fund of information! We are all of us deeply impressed with your wisdom!”

“It was only Fairy’s way,” he would apologise to himself. “She had a knack of saying anything that came into her head, without the slightest intention of wounding anyone’s feelings.”

She was not sensitive enough to have tact, but then she was “so pretty.” He was not happy during that Winter, and the sight of Maitland sometimes pained him, in spite of the calmness of her manner. He had dreaded the embarrassing moment for them both when for the

first time they should be thrown together after the alteration in their past relationship, but he had soon found that he had no reason to dread it. Maitland's presence of mind had been equal to the emergency. What if the magic lantern slides of her fancied happiness had suddenly been shattered?

It was but a magic lantern after all, and she was not the woman to cry over it, or to meet her former lover in a resentful fashion. If for one instant he stood before her in awkward silence during which he shewed signs of shyness, in the next she had energetically placed her hand in his. Her hand was cool, and her benign influence had the effect of restoring his serenity. He could scarcely comprehend her abundant good nature, and the sweet forgiveness which had not even the appearance of an effort; and though it mortified him a little, he felt comforted nevertheless.

It was no breach of the present compact that he should talk to Maitland as a

brother, and it was something to have the satisfaction of her gentle presence. When Rosette was pettish and dissatisfied, *she* was always in a kindly humour, and his face would clear as she answered to her sister's lamentations with a laugh. "Never mind—the real Rosette will return like the butterflies at the first appearance of Spring sunshine."

Yet it was a trifle inconsistent to feel at times as if her calm friendship irritated him. If she had not appeared to drop so easily into the sisterly relation, addressing him, as she did occasionally, by the title of brother, if there had been a single loophole through which he might have flattered his vanity, he might not have suffered as keenly as he did. But now it galled him to think that this highly platonic arrangement could be satisfactory to the woman he had slighted, and that there could be no retracing his footsteps—no looking back. He had a sense of shame that was new to him. For though his treachery had not been contemplated, he could not

deceive himself as to the fact that he had yet been guilty of treachery, and he could not comfort himself by continually repeating that that treachery was unconscious. This sense of shame and uneasiness was perfectly new to him, and had nothing in common with the despondency from which he had formerly suffered. His friend, De Lafarges, had once persuaded him that conscience had no independent existence, that it was only a figment of theologians, or a metaphysical fancy. But what then was this tormenting pin-prick which disturbed him day and night? why could he not banish these unsatisfactory thoughts?

“I must remind Paul of his promise to stay with me,” he decided one day, when Rosette had been more despotic than ever; “I am growing morbid in this place—I can’t think how I ever liked it. As soon as the Spring comes I must be married, and then I will take my wife to the Continent, and stay in London by the way. She will make a sensation; and it is all

nonsense about my health—it is as good now as ever it was—while as to keeping Fairy here, it is monstrous to think of it. She is the sort of girl to rebel against all such marital authority."

He had not ceased to admire the girl, and to be infatuated by her physical beauty, but his sense of possession in her was embittered by the new experience of having to reproach himself for something which seemed very much like treason—something which would have been condemned as dishonourable by his fellow-men. He felt the embarrassing situation, and looked and talked as if he felt it, regretting too late the waverings and uncertainties which had all his life caused him to be drifted by circumstances.

Book II.

CHAPTER I.

ON an evening towards the close of the following April, Paul de Lafarges arrived late, attended by his valet, and with boxes which Mr. Stanton's Welsh servants pronounced to be outlandish. A good deal of curiosity was excited by his appearance. He was clean-limbed and well-knit, with dark brown eyes set under black brows, a somewhat aquiline nose and proud lips, but it was considered to be rather disappointing that he was closely shaven, and wore no moustache sharpened

with strange cosmetics, and that there was nothing "foreigneering" about his accent.

The reign of snow had been over for some weeks, but there was still an occasional frost at night, and at ten o'clock the next morning the scantily-leaved trees with their budding foliage did little to exile the sunshine from the windows of Randall's house, so that a few rays which had not been excluded by the shutters penetrated into the bed-room in which the stranger still slept. Slept, as if he had no intention of ever waking again, worn out by the dissipation of previous months. Those who had seen him in his box at the theatre but a few nights before in Paris, with smiling lips, hair parted in the middle, and sparkling eyes, would not have recognized him in the sleeper, with yellow-brown complexion, puffy face, red eyelids, contracted forehead, and all the signs of profound fatigue and premature old age. Seen by candlelight, the darkness of the face had been principally noticeable, but the unhealthy sallowness of the skin

was more observable by daylight. He slept so soundly that he did not move till it was near eleven o'clock, when his valet crept into the room, with a slight grin on his face, took his master by the arm and shook him. The sleeper grunted, threw a book which lay close at hand at the assailant, and finally gave up the contest and allowed himself to be roused against his will. With a shudder at the cold, he went mechanically through his toilet, though for a little while his body was sleeping still. By degrees it became awake, and then he set himself to the task of reviewing his past difficulties, and his present—as he considered—most uncomfortable position, with that power of concentration which is sometimes possessed by selfish people.

He had lived fast, and had plucked the apple from the tree of good and evil, without giving any Eve the trouble of handing it to him. His father had been a Frenchman who had married an English girl, and who had insisted on giving his son the education which he considered to

be best suited to his sex. An education which, as Paul was wont to boast, was characteristic of no particular country, and which had at least destroyed all patriotism in him, and left him, as he was wont to declare, "cosmopolitan." His career of "jeune homme" which had commenced too soon, had been spent in frivolities in different parts of Europe, and had landed him in that flippant cynicism which is the most fatal malady of our age. Like Randal he had loved his mother, but she had died while he was yet young, and he had escaped from her beneficial influence in an indefinable manner, without even appearing to think of resistance. An amiable and jocose scepticism, a scepticism without conviction, if the expression may be allowed, was a strong feature in his character. He sincerely believed that no honour, no love, no prize or attraction in the world, was worth the pains which men took in trying to win these things, and that everything in the future was absolutely uncertain; but he

never enforced these theories upon others.

“It is a pity the poor devils spend their strength for so little. But it is merely a question of character or temperament,” he would remark, in that light contemptuous vein of irony which he always adopted when he expressed his astonishment at the vagaries of the human race.

Paul de Lafarges was a clever man, and he was, in his own opinion, by no means a bad one. His abilities were sufficiently keen, and at times he was even brilliant; but he needed that certainty and sense of reality which would have given the sap to his whole being—that healthy and natural emotion which would have acted as a lever to these abilities. He even thought himself good, within certain limits, though he could not help being aware of his great indifference to his kind. He hated no one, and also cared little for anyone.

“This poor Randal,” he said to himself, as he completed the operation of shaving, “thinks that I expatriate myself to this

bleak desert from the affection I have for him. Mon Dieu! what fools men are! when he knows as well as I do, that I was born with a very pretty passion for amateur gambling, and that this innocent amusement is apt to plunge me deeper and deeper into little difficulties, however one may hope to retrieve one's position as a gentleman." And he gave a little laugh, which was characteristic, as he remembered how, a few weeks before, he had been advised to disappear for a time from "Paris the beautiful," to curtail his expenses, and to look after his shattered health, and how a confiding letter had arrived from Randal just in the nick of time, offering an asylum which was a few degrees pleasanter than exile to Siberia.

"He imagines I am always young—as young as himself," he added with another laugh, as if there were nothing to mourn over in the fact that what he called his heart had been more hardened in a few years by the influences of the world than was the earth at that moment by the

induration of the past Winter. "He thinks I care for him still, as when we were boys together!"

"Boys together!" Why he felt as if centuries had intervened since then. It seemed almost as if his recollections referred to another state of existence, when they dated back to the time when he had been sent as a petticoated youngster to his mother's country, to become acquainted with the English tongue, and when he had elected Randal Stanton to the rank of his principal playmate at the select boarding-school, which was to be preparatory for Eton or Harrow. Afterwards he had spent his holidays with Randal at this very Welsh home, which had seemed a Paradise to him then, before his appetite for healthy, out-of-door life had been destroyed. Achilles and Hector the boys had been nicknamed, as they grew older, and reached the jacket and trowser stage. For if they had sympathy, they had antipathy as strong as the sympathy, liking each other sometimes for six hours

in the day, and detesting each other as cordially for the other six.

Together in the holidays they had braved the fierce winds, been burnt by the hot sun, or wet through by the unsparing rain ; the one prompt to attack, impetuous and changeable, whilst the other was tenacious, inflexible, calculating, and hardy. They had not met again till ten or twelve years afterwards, when the influence of the stronger again dominated the weaker ; but when—especially in Paul's case—an effectual gulf had intervened between the present and the past, making any attempt to fathom the mystery which attached to those intervening years useless.

“ *What a constitution I used to have when we chummed together as boys,*” thought Paul, as he gazed with another shudder at the cold-looking landscape, and put the finishing strokes to his toilet, preparatory to meeting Randal at the breakfast-table, with some mock-polite

observation about the situation of Caerwyn.

"No need," he remarked, "here for the simulated wildness, which is the highest feat of cultured art."

So little by little they fell into conversation, Paul exercising his old influence over his former companion, till before the day was over, Randal had told him all about his engagement to be married, with a desire to make things straight that was natural to him, and also with a feeling, that though no one could call his present situation pleasant, the appearance of another person upon the field might help to make it a little pleasanter than it was at present.

He told his story somewhat lamely, and as if he were conscious of a want of sympathy, and nothing could show more strongly the sort of influence that Paul had been accustomed to exercise over him, than the fact that, in telling it, he tried to lower his own motives, and make his

conduct out to be worse than it really was.

Paul heard him with the air of an easy-going man of fashion, who is shocked at nothing and surprised at nothing; and though he contented himself with making an occasional grimace, he did not interrupt his companion's confidences.

When Randal had wound up, he answered lightly—

“ So—I might have known you must be at some mischief, or you would never have remained so contentedly here. If I were in your place, I should certainly prefer the girl of whom you give so glowing a description, to the other who has nothing to recommend her but the angularities of virtue. But women, you know, are phenomena to me; charming creatures, whom philosophy condemns, but humanity adores. I never professed to understand them.”

Randal felt sorry that he had been so unnecessarily confidential. He had been used enough in past times to the half-

smiling, half-sneering tone which seemed to convey his friend's impression that he had conducted himself like a fool. But latterly he had been subjected to such different influences that he began to be a little indignant with a man to whom the storms of passion were as incomprehensible, as cuneiform inscriptions on enigmatical monuments. He remembered how Paul had been wont to boast, that *he* had no pity for the victims of human love; their raptures and their sorrows were simply signs to him of intellectual inferiority, if not of mental aberration. As to women, he prided himself on being unassailable. They were simply, as he said, the prettiest things in creation, but he absolutely refused to rank them on the same level with men. He was never angry with them, and never astonished. Their weaknesses, "their treasons," as he lightly said, "their inconsistencies, their virtues," or the stories of their sublime devotion to others, had never hitherto been able to move him.

"They are inconsequent creatures," he said, after a minute's silence; "it would be as absurd to be angry with them as with an infant who plays with a piece of valuable china, and then dashes it into numberless pieces, for its amusement. The men are the greatest idiots, who trust their hearts to such keeping."

Randal was silent for a minute from sheer anger, congratulating himself that he had only told half his story, hiding anything that had been chivalrous and generous in his intentions, and also hiding the uncomfortable *contretemps* of his actual engagement to the elder sister. He was conscious of a feeling of reaction and disgust, when he found Paul's eyes fixed on him with a curious ironical look, and knew for the first time that they had grown away from each other during their last separation, more effectually than they had ever done before.

"So," he said, breaking the silence, after a pause which became awkward,

"you are as cynical as you used to be. Who would think of coming to *you* for opinions about women? Mephistopheles himself would do them greater justice."

"It is you who are altered, *mon ami*," answered Lafarges with a laugh. "There was a time when you too could not be sufficiently sarcastic about men who fell into what was popularly called 'love.' The man who sacrificed part of his being to a woman did not seem to either of us worthy to be called a man. Every man who is deserving of the name—*vir*, as they used to say in ancient Rome—should be master of his sentiments as well as his actions, and should submit to the inflexible logic of reason."

"Apply that to gambling!"

"*Le jeu* ' is a science," answered Paul, with another laugh; "it is more than that—it is my profession. And I as well as you have a great admiration for my profession, just as in a certain way I am an admirer of women. I am never hard on them, but I

don't believe in them ; I view them philosophically, their faults are the faults of their organism. I take them as they are. Do you expect consistency from the moving sand, or immobility from the clouds ? The conduct of a woman, under nearly every circumstance, depends on the accidents which agitate her nervous system."

It was now Randal's turn to laugh.

" You think you can measure everything by your narrow plummets," he said ; " so of course you don't believe in love ; you allow nothing for the inexplicable causes and mysterious forces which may come into collision with the most vigorous wills—you altogether deny violent antipathies or attractions which may act upon people who have never met before, you mock at the idea of magnetic currents in the unexplored depths of our nature, or at occult powers which science has not yet analysed, and never will analyse."

" To be sure I do," answered Paul, and he threw away the end of his cigar, as if

he were tired of the conversation ; " I don't know much about natural science, but I understand that a daisy is the type of a whole family of plants, that the butterfly has much in common with all the other Lepidoptera, and that an angle of reflection is equal to an angle of incidence. Talk to me of what I can see and understand, and I am equal with you, but as to the rest"—he snapped his fingers contemptuously.

" I forgot," muttered Randal ; " you have seen so many evil things that you have long ago ceased to believe even in *men*. No wonder you don't believe in women. Without faith there can be no real love—it isn't made for sceptics."

Paul smiled at the indignant protest. He did not wish to quarrel so long as it suited him to be the man's guest. But he had to keep a tight grip on himself, as he answered lightly,

" Don't be savage ! I forgot your heart was in such a sensitive state that it was only protected by a tender pellicule, like

the skin which protects a melting fruit from the heat of the summer sun, and which the slightest touch might tear. Whether you marry this little country girl or not makes no difference to *me*. I happen to prefer to keep my own liberty; but I know the majority of men will make themselves fools over women sooner or later, as long as the world endures. You are only going to add another to the ridiculous list of martyrs I have known already. Pshaw ! I have known fools who have gone off into galloping consumptions, and others who have vacillated between paralysis and idiocy—all for the sake of a woman ! A martyrology for girls—it is amazing to *me*—girls, who are as foreign to us as if they were monkeys. *We* have brains, they have nerves; *we* have certain powers, they have instincts. But what does it matter? it's of no use to continue the controversy—you are only like the rest of the human race. I have always said that from the time of the Pharaohs human nature has really not altered in the least.

Such as were Babylon and Memphis, such are London and Paris. Civilization has only modified the surface of society."

"I know that one of your subjects of constant surprise is our persistence in savagery and stupidity;" answered Randal, who did not suspect Lafarges of acting, but whose good-humour was by this time restored. "And as to my future wife being 'a little country girl,' why it might be difficult exactly to define her social position, but she has been a good deal in what you call 'society.' "

"Better without it I should say."

"Perhaps!"

So the two friends separated. It was a "near shave," as Randal afterwards thought with a laugh, recurring unconsciously to his school-boy dialect, of one of the old duels, which might not have ended so well in maturer years.

Paul reflected as he reached his own apartment.

"It is nonsense. It won't suit my purpose to let him get married at present.

But he has got over this sort of thing before, and he will get over it again. She has come, and she will go. What a pity that men should be the slaves and playthings of this cursed invention called 'love,' which has done more harm to the human race than all the wars and revolutions together. And yet Randal is by no means an idiot; he has a very fair share of intelligence, and doesn't take the sickness more easily than most people. What bosh it all is!—eyes more or less large—lips more or less small, complexion more or less pale, and then a Trojan war or something as ridiculous and terrible—all for the sake of a woman—faugh!"

"A little country girl." Randal chuckled to himself in his turn as he waited to witness his friend's astonishment when he should be introduced to Rosette Gathorne. He was not disconcerted, even when Paul sneered at the curiosity mingled with agitation with which he said he was expected to meet "the Sphinx"—so he

called the lady to whom his friend was betrothed. There was no fear lest Rosette should not appear to the best advantage. For she, knowing that Randal was expecting a visitor, rose as usual to the occasion, ready as ever to captivate strangers, and scarcely ever remembering to have met a man who had not been attracted by her. She drew out from her largest trunk one of her prettiest costumes, which, if it were a little worn, could be furbished up by Maitland, who prided herself on being able to "gar auld claes look amaint as weel 's new." It was a dark brown cashmere, relieved by some dash of rose colour, which as she was well enough aware heightened the effect of her peach-blossom complexion, and shewed off to full advantage the proportions of her form, which were all in such good keeping that no artist could have looked at her without a sense of satisfaction.

And Paul, who dabbled a little in art, and who saw her for the first time in the

dark room of the little cottage, with only a few lights gleaming out from the shaded hollows of her hair, and in a mysterious dimness which added new piquancy to her beauty, was conscious of feeling a little lazy wonder.

He glanced from Rosette to Maitland, and confessed to himself that even the elder sister was possessed of something that interested ; but the younger one certainly aroused his curiosity.

“A child and yet a woman,” he said to himself. “For one born in the middle rank there is something strangely aristocratic in the taper modelling of her fingers, strangely attractive in the large eyes and brilliant complexion. How old is she—I wonder? She can’t be more than nineteen—I wonder how she talks.”

And sitting down perfectly at his ease in the cottage, and apparently forgetting that its occupants were only “country people,” and that hitherto he had thought country people only cared about eating,

and drinking, he laid himself out to please both father and daughters.

He could, when he chose, be gallant without affectation, and show that he had reaped advantages from his travels. Half French himself, he could speak Italian and German fluently, and had met many celebrated men in Europe. So that his conversation could be amusing, embellished with anecdote, and full of allusions to contemporary history. And on this occasion, under the specious pretence of being polite to Randal's friends, he was especially jocose, saying laughable things, of which Maitland purposely failed to see the point. To Mr. Gathorne, who asked his invariable question, “if the visitor cared for poetry,” he answered that he enjoyed his poetry “as a cat who laps his milk, and likes it little in quantity and not deep,” thus escaping the loan of some volumes of heavy poems; whilst he assured Rosette, who inquired about his early friendship with Randal, that “a mathematician

could not possibly have calculated the number of blows which had taken place between them when they were boys ;" and then he added significantly,

" In any real contest of will, it was always my friend there who had to give way."

" Just because wherever there was real mischief to be achieved, it was always my friend there who insisted on taking the lead," laughed Randal in reply, hardly appreciating the joke; " but don't be frightened, we both of us have given up fighting now, and neither of us pretends to any knowledge of pugilistic anatomy."

" Well, what do you think of her ?" asked Randal a little eagerly, as soon as the men were out of earshot of the inmates of the cottage. He was very willing, like most lovers, to take a favourable opinion on the subject, but Paul was careful not to satisfy him with it. Yet he answered less cynically than he had answered before.

“They are exotics, and not indigenous, and so, of course, superior to the Aborigines. I don’t, as I tell you, pretend to understand women, but if I were to give you an opinion, I should say I don’t like your grave women, burdened with responsibilities. I prefer your charming and weak creatures, who have been fortunate in escaping too learned an education—setting out on the sea of life in their pretty little barks, and their pennons streaming, without aiming at too exact a piloting.”

“Ah—to be sure,” answered Randal meditatively; “but sometimes it’s a terrible sea—very likely to bring shipwreck. Think, for instance, of the great ocean of London or Parisian life, where the poor little barks you speak of may be beaten from wave to wave.”

“That is your *new* philosophy,” said Paul contemptuously. “Let me tell you it does not suit you. When I parted from you last you were young—never given to moralise.”

“ That was before I had that attack of the blues. Did you hear of it ? ”

“ I don’t like you any the better now you are so serious. One would think that you had engaged already in what they call the ‘ battle of life,’ in the horror of revolutions political or social. What was it to *you* if a poor devil blew out his brains ! Enjoy yourself while you can—make the best of the time that passes—quick enough Heaven knows. I never cared much for it myself—I never believed in *la belle jeunesse*. But you—you believe in it, or you used to do so.”

“ He will be a fool,” he added to himself, “ if he does not secure that girl as quickly as possible.”

CHAPTER II.

PAUL'S wonder increased the next time he met Rosette in the full light of day, during one of his walks with Randal, when advancing to them with gliding steps which set off her flexible figure, she suddenly threw back her veil, and revealed the fair forehead and great blue eyes under the perfect and elongated arch of the brows. He ceased to make fun of her after that second meeting, and—inventing frequent excuses to visit at the cottage—ingratiated himself in Mr. Gathorne's good graces by speaking of the delight and honour of having a true poet for his friend, and by praising his books, and helping him to rearrange them.

He knew that his aristocratic profile and small hands were seen to the best advantage when he pretended to help Rosette's father, with a ladder against the wall, shaking the books, and altering their position, whilst he made little remarks about them, as if he had been used to it all his life. And though Randal was never more astonished in his life than when he caught Lafarges at this strange recreation, and felt a little angry and ashamed when he heard the skilful actor tell the poor old dupe that his lines on moonlight were "simply magnificent," nodding emphatically as he pronounced the words; and when he added that he had been recommending "Hannibal" as a good theme for Mr. Gathorne's pen, saying with a shy twinkle in his eye,

"Conceive that if you can—it is the next subject for his poetry;" yet he was powerless to remonstrate. He remembered that he had once played the same game himself, though now he did not like "poor Gathorne" to be laughed at; and

his conscience gave him more than one twinge, when the old man thanked him, more heartily than he was wont, for his introduction to the clever and appreciative Lafarges.

“It revived him,” he said, “to talk to such an acquaintance;” and then he continued, as a look of pleasure came into his worn, melancholy face. “If I can only carry out my idea, what a grand thing it will be!”

Maitland distrusted the new comer. Yet it was difficult for her to justify the distrust, for his cynicism was not allowed to appear on the surface. To all outward appearances he was a man of honey, with a soft voice, soft words, a soft hand, and a complexion that looked to the fresh country-people as if he had hitherto lived in a dungeon. His coats were cut in a fashion likely to drive an English tailor to distraction, and his shirts fitted without a wrinkle. Yet, like Randal Stanton, when the Spring days returned he donned countrified knickerbockers and

velveteen shooting-jackets, and it was taken as a good sign that he dismissed his valet, and took to tramping over the mountains in company with his friend, till the fresh air began to give a tinge of colour to his sallow cheeks.

During these rambles, the two men often met the girls from the cottage, for at this early season of the year, when there were few people at Llandyffryn, it was only natural that they should be constantly thrown into each other's company. Llandyffryn was already undergoing its annual transformation—a transformation that insensibly gladdened Maitland's heart, helping her life to return naturally to its old, peaceful course, with the old reflections and thoughts settling back once more. In the young blossoming of the year, and the re-awakening of the Spring, when all living things were glad, it seemed as if she must be glad too, and as if a gleam of blue sky were let through the shadows of her own heart, as she stretched her limbs in freedom, and drew

deep breaths of the fresh air, or listened to the sea-murmur of the wind through the pine trees and plumpy larches. Looking back upon the Winter, it seemed to her now as if it had been passed in a bad dream, in which her energies had been paralysed by a sort of tearless stupor, and in which she had performed her ordinary duties with the dull exactitude of an automaton.

During those dreary wintry days, when she had looked at the mountains, against which for centuries past the elements had warred,—with rains washing away their soil, lightnings rending their surface, and the winds making them the object of their fury,—she had often been unable to struggle against her depression. “All,” she had thought, “must suffer pain. Why should *I* be an exception to the universal law? Why should *I* not endure silently?”

But now the pain itself seemed to be forgotten, and the stupor had passed away. The little rills sang “peace—

peace ;" the murmur in the larches answered "joy!" And the song of the lark seemed to preach to her in the early morning, " Pain is but a minor note in the symphony of nature! What matter if our souls are raised to Heaven, and if we are following the path which leads to perfect day?" All Nature seemed to sing to her, " You are tired—*rest!*"

But she answered, " No—not yet. When *His* time comes for me to lie down in quietness, then indeed I may rest; but now I may be of use to some of His creatures. I am not beautiful—not interesting. But what does that matter, if I may only be of service to the many I love?"

For now that the hour of suffering was over, she had a pleasant consciousness that her power of helping those around seemed to be indefinitely increased. She no longer thought of the waste of love and power in the world—of the tender-hearted women who could never become mothers, the musicians who never wrote a

note of music, or the geniuses who never even suspected the existence of their genius. For everything seemed to illustrate to her the wider and fuller meaning of the law of love.

The motherly protective instinct had returned to her during the Spring walks in which she acted as pioneer to the prettiest spots in the neighbourhood, and she surprised Randal by the ease with which she recovered her old habit of leading the conversation to her favourite topics, and by the old look which had now returned to her face—"a kind of look," as he had once explained, "which lights it up, and reminds one of the sunset;" but above all, by her old determination not to shirk anything that was disagreeable, even when it led her into frequent arguments with Paul de Lafarges.

De Lafarges was much astonished at her. These excursions were a secret weariness to him. He had to pretend admiration for the huge shadows of gigantic cliffs, which in reality made him

shiver. He cared nothing for geology, but had patiently to endure looking at the opposing and precipitous fronts of hills, which showed, by the correspondence of their strata, that they must have been rent asunder by some violent convulsion of Nature. On one occasion he would be dragged up a steep mountain to see a few stones, of which tradition said that they had once constituted a British fortified post of extraordinary strength; and on another occasion, he would be expected to venture into one of the boats called coracles, with ribbed frames of wicker-work, covered with skin, and was enthusiastically told that they dated from the times of Herodotus and Strabo.

He bore all this because it was convenient to stay at Llandyffryn, and to do as others did, as long as he remained at the place; but he had expected to have the conversation all in his own power, and Maitland's quiet way of differing from him was a perfectly new experience.

“Who told you so?” she asked quickly,

the first time he hazarded some sneer at the expense of her religion. "Not the Bible; the Bible leaves every mystery mysterious; its grand suggestions seem absurd to you, because you are unable to follow them."

"People are fated to disagree upon a good many topics; they are trained differently, that is all—all one's associations come from training," he answered, with easy banter, which made Randal say to himself—

"I wish I had been gifted with half his amount of unconscious impudence. It might have stood me in good stead if I had had his careless way of getting out of difficulties."

To Maitland's face Paul would say, "Listen—the nymph Egeria speaks"—he had taken at once to calling her Egeria. And behind her back he would speak of her good-temperedly as an "amiable fanatic." "If it were not for her religious ideas there would not be a better woman

living," he remarked one day to Randal; who muttered in reply,

"A defect on the right side—take my word for it."

"Her sentiments do her credit," he said, with light irony.

"Well—if you think she is right, why not follow her advice?"

"Ha, ha! a capital joke. I very nearly dropped the mask and betrayed myself when she adjured us about the small number of men who attend the churches in the present day. As if religion, as she says, was made for one sex, and as if the absence of men in public worship did not cause a decadence in religion. Why, my father was a Catholic, and my mother a Protestant, and I am one or the other, or both, just as you please to take it, and yet I get on very well without entering a church. Some of us, in this nineteenth century, worship the Goddess Nature, and a few what they choose to call the "advancement of the race," but the greatest number

of us offer sacrifice to the Goddess Pecunia."

Randal coloured, but did not laugh ; and his lip trembled a little as he replied,

"She is a girl of unusually fine tastes and feelings ; I don't like to have her laughed at."

"Fine feelings, combined with rather an odd unconventionality."

"That may be. You call her strange, but I call her exceptional—she is a noble woman."

"Goodness knows," answered Paul, still with his tone of irony, "I should think she would be rather likely to rebel against marital tyranny ; and to prove eccentric in defiance of all canons of interpretation."

In his secret heart he said to himself :

"She is too cold and serious. I can't endure such women ; not even good-looking, and with undesirable points about her."

But he liked to pretend to amuse himself with her conversation, as an artifice to avert suspicion. He talked to her, and

looked at the beautiful sister who walked by her side, in her most graceful attitudes, with the soft Spring air playing with her radiant hair, and only troubling herself to join in the talk a little, when it kept to the shallows. The pure regularity of Rosette's features, her blue eyes fringed with dark lashes, and the exquisite harmony of her contour, were not her principal attractions in the eyes of this man of the world, who had been indifferent to the prettiness of many another woman. Her greatest charm to him was in the rare grace which she not only showed in her walk, but in her gestures, and in every expression of her face. She was such a mere girl, and yet whenever he tried to speak to her, she looked at him and answered him with the sovereign ease of a woman who feels that there is not one weak point in her beauty. Now and then he addressed her, talking especially to her, and telling her stories about Parisian and London life; but "the little country girl" did not listen

to him open-mouthed, as children listen to fairy stories, nor did he astonish her in the least.

“There is a *je ne sais quoi*,” he said to her in an aside, one morning when he stopped under the pretence of gathering her a wild flower; “a something indescribable about you which would tell me you have travelled, and that you have not been buried all your life in these dens of the earth.”

And yet in the same breath he answered Randal, who was accusing him of not having any special taste for the wild Welsh scenery.

“That all depends! In my present mood I like these marionnettes which we endow with our passions, and which are always repeating any rôle which pleases us. We believe naïvely in the fury of unchained winds, in the sighs of streams, and the pathetic gaze of the moon—just as the Greeks believed in their Naiads and Oreads;” and then he went on to repeat some legends connected with glens

and waterfalls. He never doubted if such strategy were justifiable. He would as soon have thought of doubting whether Rosette's instinct as a woman would enlighten her as to the true meaning of the veiled inuendoes, and the hinted compliments, which he managed to insinuate every now and then, and which caused the drooping of her blue-veined eyelids, and the deepening of the delicate colour on her cheeks. His position lost none of its piquancy from the fact that he had already an acknowledged rival in the field, and that Rosette was avowedly engaged to his friend. Had not Stanton himself talked confidentially to him as if he were doubtful of the wisdom of such an engagement? And as to his own pretended indifference to women! It was true that he had lost all faith in the sex; but his pale lips curled with something like a sneer, as he thought of Randal's simplicity in crediting his indifference. "Am I ice or stone," he asked himself, "that the unusual attractions of a very pretty

girl should be powerless to charm me? Especially in a place like this where there is nothing else to do."

Some of the women he had known had been handsome enough—one or two of them had been witty, and others had shewn their admiration for him openly. But Rosette was not of their kind, and perhaps he took a fancy to her because she was different. Her voice seemed to have tuned itself in the voices of birds—her eyes reminded him of the blue seas of her native land. Paul asked himself, like the fatalist that he was,

"Why had she taken such a hold on his imagination unless she were destined to act a part in the rôle of his future life?" Some fate was surely on him, how else explain the unaccountable craze which made him suddenly covet this English maiden? She was certainly not more beautiful than some other girls whom he had met at balls and promenades, and but a few weeks ago he was sneering at the absurdity of loving a woman. Why

did he now seem to be seized with a sudden fascination which did not leave him time to reflect?

"It is Stanton's fault," he thought, "for taking me too literally. He himself argues that all men are made of wax, and yet he selects a special bit of waxy material, holds it to the fire, and wonders if it melts." No, he was never hampered by conscientious subtleties. But a day or two before he had amused himself by watching the look of horror in the elder sister's rounded eyes when he hazarded the remark that everybody in the present day was more or less an actor.

"I don't know about hypocrisy," he answered laughingly to her indignant rejoinder. "In our days all the masks have been so used up, and are so transparent, that only fools hope to cover their faces with them. Clever people hold them in their hands. And as to what you call conscience, it is but a development of the moral instinct—and the instinct varies according to special cases."

" It never varies in my experience."

" No," he said, still laughing. " I daresay not. Acknowledge that ever since you have lived you have never committed a folly—never yielded to a fancy or a caprice. You are the first lady I have ever met of whom I can say as much. Your heart is like a chronometer."

He had become very free and easy before he could talk like this, and this appearance of giving his confidence to the elder sister who distrusted him, suited him at the present crisis. It was one of the numerous ruses of which he availed himself, to prevent Randal from discovering the truth. A change in his face, or an alteration in his voice, might betray him and expose him to observation, and therefore he carefully watched himself. He was too accustomed to self-pleasing to take any serious view of the matter. A project which was acknowledged to be founded upon treachery might have been distasteful to him, but in this case there seemed to be no positive treachery. It appeared

to him that the game was more or less justifiable, especially as in Rosette's case there was no dignified stronghold to be broken down, no movement of terrified repulsion when he addressed her as he often did, in low tones of admiration—tones which were not ambiguous; he was determined there should be no mistaking them.

“The little girl doesn't even pretend to care for him. At any rate she is no hypocrite,” he thought; “and if the worst come to the worst, I must put him under some serious obligation to myself, and then he will be glad enough to pay off old scores—and after all, who knows—he may possibly console himself with the nymph Egeria?”

So as the Spring days went on, passed in the somewhat tame amusement of trout-fishing, boating, or riding on horseback, and as Rosette's alluring beauty cast its spell more and more over him, his active brain was calculating, inventing, planning. There was one mistake in his cal-

culations—he had never yet met with any one so utterly negative or irresponsible as Rosette Gathorne. Whilst he was laying his plans for the future, *she* was thinking only of the present, and he had not made proper allowance for her egregious vanity. She took it only as a matter of course that every man with whom she should come in contact, should be more or less subjugated by her attractions, and she was simply obeying a law of her nature by trying to look her best when a stranger was in the way.

Engaged or non-engaged did not convey facts of great significance to Rosette. She had, as she told her sister, been “half-engaged already, two or three times before.” But Randal had sunk low in her good opinion at this crisis, for one important omission—he had ceased to flatter her. Perhaps it was his experience of the elder sister which had effectually sealed his lips—perhaps a pang of remorse which sometimes seized him when he remembered how he had been compelled to let

things take their course, and how the lapse of time had effectually decided him; but from one cause or other, he never praised Rosette's beauty. He even looked a little dissatisfied with her when she—who was determined to join the rides, and who had had no lessons in riding on horseback—was by no means disconcerted at her own awkwardness in mounting, and by no means ashamed of her puerile cries when she was frightened at nothing, or her little affected fits of laughter without any adequate cause.

“Never mind—you will soon get used to it; your figure is made for horseback, and though you are not big enough for a perfect Amazon—you are a sylph instead of a caryatide—still you will ride like an Ariel in time, and that is better,” said De Lafarges, who often availed himself of these rides by the stone walls adorned with ferns, and over the wild undulating country, to get side by side with Rosette, and to make little speeches to her, with a smile that showed his upper gums and large

regular teeth, making him look, as Randal had said, just a little like Mephistopheles.

“Don’t you long sometimes,” he asked on one of these occasions, “after something more attractive than this terrible routine life—the society of London, or of Paris, for instance? You would shine in either city.”

“Oh, very much!” she said impulsively. “I often envy people who have plenty of servants, large and stately houses, and plenty of parties. I have not much ambition, and I should not care for trouble; but I fancy I should know very well how to spend money.” And then, as if conscious of the admission which she had made, and a little frightened at it, she added with a laugh, “But *we* are to go London sometimes, you know, by and by, though during the greater part of the time *we must* stay at Llandyffryn.”

He shook his head two or three times at this allusion to her marriage, shrugged his shoulders, and said,

“In the long dreary Winters, for in-

stance—think how long they will be. It may be all very well for most women, but I don't like it for *you*."

"Why not for *me*?"

"Because it will be too insignificant a life for you; because your beauty will be wasted in it. It is preposterous, quite an anomaly to think of such a thing."

"That is nonsense," she said, dimpling and bridling becomingly, as she always did at his openly expressed admiration. "I told you I should not care for the sort of grandeur which would involve trouble—and—you should not pay me such compliments."

"I don't call them compliments—they are only the truth—you are simply the most fascinating woman I ever have seen—and that, let me tell you, is a good deal for *me* to say, for I have seen pretty women in nearly every capital in Europe."

The flattery was hardly fulsome enough—she would have liked him to say the "most handsome" woman—yet it was very pleasant to her, and she put the

little hand which held the whip, with a pretty gesture, to her ear, saying pleadingly,

“Don’t—don’t! you make me feel foolish—don’t say such things.”

She did not venture to look at him—it was necessary to her coquettish response that she should hang her head and blush—or she could hardly have helped seeing the curiously half-sarcastic, half-triumphant look which was creeping over his face, as he added,

“I am never in the habit of doing things by halves, and from the first moment I saw you, I admired you—completely—I have never seen anybody to compare with you.”

“Don’t, don’t,” she continued, for his vehement words a little excited her, a little alarmed her, though she did not exactly know why; and from a mixture of feelings which would have been difficult to define, a great tear rolled from her eye, and hung like a wet pearl on her eyelashes. “Don’t take advantage of me by saying such things; you don’t know how you

echo my thoughts when you talk of the dreary life I have before me here in Wales. When I am thirty years old," she added, dropping her voice; "they will say, 'What a well-preserved woman!' because I can do nothing but vegetate here—and when I am dead, they will write on my tomb, 'She existed, but she did not *live*!'"

His theory was that women even more than men were all "more or less actors," fibbing more or less prettily, and seldom speaking the exact truth. And yet something in the Pysche-like expression of her face, something in the ingenuous simplicity of her words when, for once, she was perfectly natural, touched and surprised him more than her hesitating coquetry, her childish struggle with herself, or the bewitching airs which she was so accustomed to assume, and he began to wonder if she possessed a heart, as well as being charming.

"Decidedly, she is my fate," he thought, as he answered eagerly, "Ah, you see it! what is the good of all your beauty if

you are to be buried in this hole? It is a sacrifice worse than that of Iphigenia. Your hair must not turn grey here, before the world has admired you."

"She may be only a foolish girl, all the better for not having too much intellect, and being taken so quickly with my bait," he added to himself; "and if I were a philosopher, I might perhaps reason that her sentiments have not the elevation of noble souls, and her affections not the absolute fidelity of an exalted love. But what did I ever expect of the sex? She has the advantage of being a little different from the girls in my country, who are reared after a pattern in convents, and mature only too quickly into calculating women. And seeing that I am not a philosopher, and that I hope to be able to keep a watch over my wife—well—I need not argue about it," he added with his odd mixture of French and English, "*Hurrah for la belle jeunesse!*"

But even Lafarges could not always dismiss thought. The night was clear

and limpid when, after smoking as usual with Randal, he retired to his room. There was a magnificent moon, which flooded everything, even the paths, as well as the trees and grass, in his friend's well-kept garden with silver light. Little breaths of wind occasionally shook the pines, and forced from them the plaintive moan at which he had laughed.

"I am anthropomorphic, like the rest of them," he thought sneeringly of himself, and laughing at the fine word, as the soughs of wind came and went like the respiration of human beings. Further away, a sort of black drapery seemed to hang in heavy folds over the sea, and thick bands of cloud darkened the horizon. It was like a menace to the transparent serenity of the landscape, but a menace lost in the distance. "A bad night for people who believe in ghosts, or people who own nerves—with a thunder-storm brewing somewhere in the distance;" he thought, as he looked steadily out. "But *I* have nothing to do with

nerves. Let me explain myself to myself. I love the girl, and am accustomed to have my own way. Nothing will make me renounce that love, I have taken my resolution irrevocably. *He* thinks he can do what he likes with me. *He* fancies that he too is ready to die for Rosette. He imagines that I am a cynic and philosopher—a mysogynist, because I have so represented myself. And he forgets that I am tolerably young too. Have I not flesh and blood like himself? I have not squandered my affections on all sorts of passing fancies, though I have had plentiful opportunity, my affections are as fresh and unalloyed as ever. I don't wish to excuse myself. I have scorned this feeling in a sort of way, but I have been conquered. As to Stanton, I hardly pity him, he ought to have known me better! He should have placed an *old* man or a coward in this position, not one who is accustomed to overcome resistance, and to vanquish obstacles."

CHAPTER III.

"AND what's the matter with my little Steenie?" said Maitland, a few days afterwards, when everything having fallen into routine order, she had taken her needlework, as usual, after her household duties were over, to sit by the invalid child, and help him to prepare his lessons.

Stephen did not answer; he only dropped his head so as to hide his face. But Maitland saw the convulsive working of the muscles, and the large tear which splashed on a book which the boy had been studying. She came nearer, and pillow'd his head on her breast, stroking

the fair curly hair, and saying to him tenderly,

“Tell me all about it, darling.”

Steenie was usually a grave, patient, and rather precocious little man; so that she was totally unprepared for the passion of uncontrollable sobbing which shook the poor child with its violence, and in which he whispered,

“Oh, why does God let me live; when I shall never be like other boys and girls —only, as they say, in everybody's way?”

“*Who says—who is ‘everybody?’*” answered the elder sister, indignant and puzzled. “We hope, dear, that when you are stronger you may be able to run about—and meanwhile you are of plenty of use to us all. You have been of use to me by teaching me a lesson of patience. Is it because you have no games?” she asked, after a little pause, following the direction of the boy's eyes, which were now looking out upon a field in which

some of the village children were merrily running races.

“ Oh, no ! I did feel that once, but I had made up my mind to it. I know it is hard not to play cricket, or to run races—and to miss football and all that sort of thing. But I didn’t feel it lately—not at least when we used to have those peeps of the sea—those pretty excursions in the lanes, before the others came. It has often looked so nice to see the school-children running about, and I have wished I could run. But oh ! that is not the worst of it,” he added, with the incoherency of childhood, as the tears and sobs came faster than ever ; “ it was what they said when they thought I didn’t hear them—and if it is true—oh, why have I been ill—or why did God let me be born—if I am always to have pain ? If I only knew I should be well next week or to-morrow—but if I am to live on, and be a burden to you—”

Maitland’s sympathetic tears were coming now, as she saw the bitterness of the

child's grief. But she knelt down by her brother, and held him closer to her heart, as she said softly,

"I know; I know,—it is a very hard trial for you, God only knows *why* you have been ill, my pet, and He only knows whether you will ever be *quite* well and strong. But, darling, it is not like you to be rebellious against His will. It is only a dark cloud passing over you just now, just as the clouds are passing now outside, and leaving the blue sky clearer than ever. You will forget it soon—you will be my own patient darling brother once more. I will get Mr. Stanton to wheel you again to see the sea, through the beautiful lanes in which the wild roses were blowing, and in—"

"No, no!" cried the boy, almost wildly, raising the pale face which told of such secret suffering. "No, no, not Mr. Stanton. He will bring his French friend—and—and—I could not bear it. They shall never do anything more for me."

"Why? was it *they* who said the things

which have hurt you?" asked the elder sister, slowly; for she was beginning to have a faint inkling of the truth.

"Oh, they thought I was asleep, they thought I didn't hear them," said the boy, making a violent effort to recover himself, but frightening her more than ever by a sudden shiver that passed over him, and by the chattering of his little white teeth.

"And they said?"—asked Maitland, anxiously, as she wrapped her warm shawl round him, and looked earnestly at his little sorrowful face.

"It wasn't they, it was *he*!" answered Steenie, still unwillingly.

"Well then, *he*?"

"The foreign friend of his—oh, I hope it isn't wicked—I hate him."

"You should not hate him; but what did *he* say?"

"He said," answered the child, speaking with some difficulty. "Why do you bother yourself so about that poor little chap—carrying him about, and humour-

ing him, and only prolonging his misery? It will never do him a bit of good, all the time that they waste upon him.' And then he said a good deal more, how I should grow up a deformed man, and be a hindrance to other people; and that it was a pity. And then that the Greeks and Romans managed those things a good deal better in infancy than we do.' Oh, Maitie! I did not quite understand that. What did he mean?" asked the boy, with wide-open eyes. "I have read so little you know, and I don't know much about what the Romans did with their deformed babies. But," lowering his voice; "I *guess*"

"Don't guess. Never mind what he meant, darling, it was only utter nonsense," answered Maitland, trying to veil her glow of anger by talking as rapidly as possible; whilst all the time her heart cried passionately, "How could he—oh, how could he? This is the philanthropy of pagan philosophy, which they would revive, a philanthropy which

only made regulations for the strong and beautiful, and never stretched forth a hand of helpfulness to the maimed or broken in mind or body."

And when Steenie went on questioning her, she answered,

"Darling, don't ask about what the Romans did. Try to forget them. What does it matter what *they* thought about lame boys or sickly women? It was Jesus who stretched forth his hand to the halt and the lame. Jesus would have you live and do your work for him in the world. He who was once the King in his beauty, never despised weak women or suffering children. Why, Steenie, what a contemptible self-sufficient world it would be if there were no sick people in it to teach us not to be selfish, and to prevent us from thinking of our own foolish pleasures."

Then as the child's pale face told that his system had been overwrought, she refused to talk to him any more about it just then, but went to fetch him a slice of

the cake which she made with her own hands, and a glass of warm spiced wine which was also concocted at home, and persuading him to lie down sat by his side reading to him in a low musical voice, till he became quieter and more placid, and at last fell into a tranquil sleep.

Even then her indignation had not calmed down, and she felt as if for a time she could not endure to meet Lafarges. She could not blame him for the opinions which Steenie had overheard. He was no doubt consistent in holding those opinions, and had never had the least suspicion that the boy would overhear them. For what was Steenie to him after all, only a strange study, a new experience! No doubt he looked at him with a sort of pity, as an illustration of a chronic form of physical degradation, which should be stamped out, like leprosy, or like anything else that might retard the progress of the race.

“Oh, if Christianity were not true, or if we were not to copy our virtues from

Christ, how could I endure to live in the world, or little Stephen either?" she thought, as she sat beside the child's bed, looking at the closed eyelids, and the colourless face, and feeling as if it had been a cruel necessity which of late had obliged her so often to accompany Rosette, and to leave her brother so much to his own society.

The night which followed seemed long and anxious to her. For Maitland rose more than once in it to steal into Steenie's room, and look at the restless sleeper. Towards the morning his breathing grew more easy, and the painful look passed away from his face. But his sister refused to leave him, and Rosette was left for a few days to her own devices.

It was then that Maitland determined to caution her.

"I do not like this friend of Randal's, I do not trust him," she said a little nervously to her sister. "I am sure you cannot intend it, and as you are engaged to be married, it may perhaps

be more permissible—but it seems to me you are letting him pay you too much attention."

"As if a man might not even look at me without my resenting it, *you* who talk about self-consciousness, you would make me a prude," retorted Fairy contemptuously. "You are very unfair to Randal's friend."

"I don't think I am; but we know very little about him. It seems to me that Randal does not know much about his antecedents himself. They knew each other as boys, and then they lost sight of each other for a long interval, and met each other again after years on the Continent, not in the happiest or best time in Randal's life, dear, remember."

"I know what you are driving at, they 'gambled,' as you call it, a little together. I don't want to make a mystery of it, so I say it straight out," said Rosette, emphasising the word with a pretty little nod. "Well, and if they did, it was only like all young men! one swallow

doesn't make a Summer, and if you have found a man wrong once, it doesn't follow he will be wrong for ever. I told Randal only yesterday that I didn't want to marry an admirable Crichton, and that I thought it was only absurd of him when he said he had left off playing whist, and didn't care to begin it again."

"*You told him so? Was that wise?* There are certain cases in which abstinence is better than temperance. I don't say that cards hurt most people, but—" and Maitland broke off abruptly, with a pang at her heart, without finishing her sentence.

"*You are very polite with your insinuations, but you are very much mistaken if you think I want to keep any man always dangling at my apron strings—that is not my idea of marriage. I expect liberty myself, and I shall give my husband plenty of liberty,*" answered Rosette with a toss of her head.

"*There may be such a thing as too much liberty, especially when people—*

are—engaged to be married," said Maitland, blurting out the words with scarlet cheeks, and not attempting to fire her little shot without many anxious misgivings lest she should seriously wound her sister.

"Do you think so? then our opinions differ, and I flatter myself I can take plenty of care of myself, and I know most about the world," answered Rosette, whose surface feelings remained ungrazed by the blank-cartridge which had been discharged at her; and whose opinion of the virtuous strength of her own resolutions had been increased by a little episode which had happened the day before, when, in attempting at low tide to pass on stepping-stones over the shallow bed of the river, Randal's friend had suddenly caught her up, and carried her dry-footed over the stream. She congratulated herself when she recalled the little dignified air of offence with which she said to Paul before the others came up to them.

"I must beg of you never to attempt

such practical jokes again," and had no suspicion that he in his turn had congratulated himself on the success of his experiment, and the easy indifference with which Randal had permitted him to lift his *fiancée*.

"The fellow is scarcely worth grappling with, but yet I had some sort of feeling for him when I was a youngster," he said to himself, "and I may as well put it out of his power to reproach me in the future. I can make it worth his while to submit to the inevitable, and the sooner I set about 'breaking him in' the better."

That evening when the two men were sitting over their cigars, De Lafarges took the opportunity of drawing the conversation again to the subject of his favourite recreation.

"It is the absurdest nonsense to be set against a thing by a mere accident," he reasoned, "a poor devil blew out his brains because he was disappointed at the gaming-table—he would have done

just the same if he had been disappointed in love—and you are so illogical and so weak as to refuse to touch billiards or a card in consequence. You have caught the tone of our modern Lucretia in speaking against the finest amusement in the world, this little solemn Maitland Gathorne has laid her spells upon you; but her virtues are too exclusively old-fashioned to please me. Let us look at the thing calmly, and not from a woman's point of view. A good card-player or a good billiard player needs power, needs boldness, needs energy, needs perseverance; he must be able to make sacrifices, to endure hardness, to bear reverses, in fact he needs nearly everything that goes to make the man."

"But where's the use of possessing these things if they are to be squandered on—nothing," answered Randal with a shrug. "I know that I have changed, and that you and I differ just a little about some things. Cosmopolitan you call yourself; but you have been accustomed for

the greater part of your life to mix only with that form of humanity which has changed its laws and its master. All its study is in the book of Nature—that is its eternal gospel. And the rule of its life is self-pleasing. Now I am not going to cant at you—the words Infidel and Atheist are often brandished without meaning, and with opprobrium; but it seems to me that the nearest approach to them is—well—when a man lives only for his own excitement—and is—a god to himself."

De Lafarges smiled—a superior smile.

"I remember the time," he said, "when you and I believed that life was worth nothing without adventure, and for the sake of that love of adventure we encountered innumerable scratches. But when you talk of self-pleasing, you forget the discipline involved in play—you forget the perilous necessity—the very condition of the so-called gamester's existence without which his life would be insupportable—honour. Is that honour to be treated as

if it were nothing? Does not the gamester learn to endure all the reverses of fortune—to triumph without bragging—to lose without complaining? I have known fellows on the Continent who have been in such perfect training as to pass from the highest to the lowest ranks of society without a murmur."

"Rogues and blacklegs!" muttered Randal to himself. But his companion's quick ear caught the words.

"What was that little observation of yours, in your ugly English words?" he asked laughing. "Say rather benefactors who sacrificed their own fortunes to the public weal, and who came out from the contest battered, knocked about, and stripped of everything they possessed to begin the battle again with a smile. Is that a bad education which nerves a man to endure all the vicissitudes of life, and teaches him always to remain calm—always master of himself? *Vive le jeu!*"

"By what sophisms you delude yourself—reasoning like that charming cha-

racter in Goethe's poem to which I am always comparing you."

" And by what sophisms you delude yourself—reasoning like a Trappist. No; you call me cold, but I am beginning to change some of my ideas, and I don't believe that the old monks had the secret of annihilating the past; nor that, after life had ceased round them, they did not still feel in their hearts the fever of its remembrance! A man may have gone through the amputation of a limb, but he suffers still from the member he has lost. And I don't envy you the mutilated existence which you live here in this out-of-the-world place—cut off from all excitement and proper association with your kind. It is stagnation—not life; it is weakness—sheer weakness."

Randal coloured, for the words somehow chimed in with certain little entreaties which had come from Rosette's pretty lips, setting some of his newly formed convictions topsy-turvy; and Paul, who had had a pretty good idea that his last

answer would nettle him, looked a little anxiously at his firmly compressed lips and knit brows, and then added in his lightest tone :

“ I remember you beat me in the last game of *écarté* we had together. I’ve been longing for my revenge ever since.”

“ A challenge—I understand,” answered Randal, endeavouring to speak as lightly, though certain echoes of Maitland’s entreaties on the subject still seemed to be dinning in his ears. What did it matter to him now? He was no longer engaged to Maitland, and had not Rosette herself begged him not to give up his cards? “ A challenge,” he repeated slowly, “ I have no excuse for refusing you, as you are my guest.”

The matter was allowed to drop then. But on the first rainy evening when they were kept indoors, De Lafarges referred to it, saying with a smile : “ We will play for stakes which would not even alarm your little Puritan. But let it be a proper duel. It is so long since I found an anta-

gonist worthy of my steel. Whichever gives way first will acknowledge himself the weakest."

"Let the stakes be what you please. I never do a thing by halves," answered Randal trying to smile, as at some good jest. "I don't pretend to have a big balance at my banker's; and what said the Parisian who found his boy with an empty purse, 'My son, till you have four eyes in your head, risk not your gold at *écarté*.' But as to playing for nothing, it is neither one thing nor the other. It's not worth while to rise from the table as you sat down."

It was about nine o'clock when they sat down to play—solemnly and seriously, as if their lives depended on the upshot of the game. A couple of hours passed, but still they sat as silent as two automatons, but for the words they occasionally uttered that had reference to the game.

De Lafarges lost in the beginning of the evening, and then steadily gained,

like a skilful jockey on a race-course, reserving his horse's force for the last important efforts, when the lungs of the other horses begin to be exhausted. When the clock struck eleven, Randal moved to ring the bell and to tell the servant who generally waited on him to close the house and go to bed. Almost mechanically he raised the blind at the same moment, and gave one searching glance out of the window where, as on a former night which he well remembered, Cassiopea was shining in all her glory, with the Great Bear glittering like diamonds, and other less important constellations. Whilst from the Cottage, which was now almost hidden by the foliage, a lesser star glimmered from one of the casement windows, and brought to his mind's eye the picture of a patient industrious little woman, with a sweet earnest face, stooping diligently over her needle-work, or other work which might be still more tiring to her poor brain; always hopeful, never despairing—never even complaining of the meagreness of

her earnings, and never priding herself on doing more than others had done. A great pang struck at his heart, and his throat felt dry as he reproached himself for superstition in feeling as if a gulf flowed between him and her.

“God bless her!” he thought to himself, as words from a poem of Aubrey de Vere’s suddenly occurred to his memory,

“She will not hear you in her turret musing,
High thoughts, too high to mate with mortal song!
Bend o’er her, gentle Heaven, but do not claim her.”

And then he added with sudden self-contempt: “What have I to do with Heaven? A man weak as water, unstable in purpose—so vacillating that he succumbs to the charms of mere physical beauty—so powerless to say ‘No!’ that he lets himself be talked over like another Faust, because he cannot deny himself the slightest pleasure!”

These reflections were cut short by the appearance of the servant.

"Bring wine!" said his master, in a testy voice, not in keeping with his usual character; "wine, and a couple of wine-glasses—with biscuits—for we may sit up late—do you hear?"

"Brandy and soda," corrected Paul; "that is the proper thing."

But when the spirit was put upon the table De Lafarges only pretended to wet his lips with it. Clearness of brain was an essential for the business he had before him. Again they remained seated at the card-table in a state of dumbness and quiescence, more like machines than living men.

"You might have played that last hand better," said De Lafarges presently, breaking the normal silence of the table.

"Confound the cards!" answered Randal, with a laugh; "shuffle them, my dear fellow—the luck's against me to-night."

"All the fault of this dead alive Caerwyn. I remember when Fortune used to

bestow all her favours upon *you*. I think we had better give over," said Lafarges, with an answering laugh.

"No, no;—I must have my revenge," returned Randal resolutely, though his heart beat so violently that he shifted his position as if it had been possible for his antagonist to hear its pulsations.

"By all means," answered Lafarges, in a tone of courteous indifference. And again there was silence. But before the clock struck one Randal began to lose more seriously. His complexion was pale, and his lips were discoloured with fatigue and anxiety. But he would not acknowledge that he was anxious; his face wore a forced smile, and his hand still remained firm. Three o'clock struck, and the early morning light began to creep into the room. The master of the house had begun to lose more seriously still, but he had called for fresh cards and had determined to see the issue of another venture. He had taken a little brandy before, and now he

drank a whole wine-glass full. Four o'clock struck, and there were sounds of life in the village. The man-servant, who distrusted his master's visitor, was already stirring, and Randal offered his friend breakfast.

“Not for me,” said De Lafarges, smiling as pitilessly as before. “You know I did not in the least intend this when I sat down, but if you will go on with it—well—I will take a raw egg beaten up in a little sherry, but I couldn’t eat just at present. I always keep the head clear when I am playing.”

“Game!” he added, in the same breath, turning up another King. “Really, this is a rapid influx of good luck which I do not quite understand.”

“Keep the head clear!” it sounded like sarcasm to Randal, whose mind was in a whirl, so that thinking became impossible, and whose brain felt as if it would throb itself out of his head.

“Ah, I remember; you have a constitution of iron. It will not be the first

night by a good many that I have tested your strength, but I am your match still as far as energy goes, though my health may have failed me a little," answered Randal, doggedly. "Go on—we'll have another game," he continued, staring at the card-table as if he did not see it, but hastily dealing the cards.

"With all my heart, if you wish it, you may conquer me yet;" said Paul, whose face still betrayed his feeling of amusement. "But don't say that *I* persuaded you. Take a little more brandy. It suits *me* to be abstemious, I shall take it out by-and-by. But you need not measure yourself by me. Why, I have sat at a rubber without taking food for nearly a dozen hours at a stretch, and I have remained in one position for nearly twenty. But one man's constitution is no criterion for another's, and you have only to say you are done up, and we will give up the play."

Randal smiled. It was rather a ghastly smile, but he flattered himself he suc-

ceeded in looking as if he did not care very much whether the event was, or was not, favourable. He was determined not to disgrace himself by showing any acuteness of sensibility. Still his hand had become unsteady; his face, which his admirers sometimes called "statuesque," was now rudely coloured, and voices seemed to be ringing in his ears. The old intoxication was upon him, and he remembered that a mere accident might change the current of the game, whilst he had already lost too much not to wait for that accident.

Half-past four o'clock came, and for a little while the wheel of fortune seemed to turn. The old intoxication grew stronger, and it was more difficult than ever for Randal to avoid some expression of his anxiety.

"No; I can't leave off now. I begin to feel some life," he exclaimed, a little irritably, stooping forward with his hand to his head, and concentrating all his interest on the game, as De Lafarges

again declared himself ready to cry "content," and reminded him that they had remained there all night already.

Five o'clock, and again Stanton was losing seriously. He went on doggedly, but the face which had been flushed half-an-hour before, now became white with an awful death-like unhealthy whiteness; while his companion's complexion, ordinarily by far the most unhealthy of the two, remained of its usual colour. The sound as of a buzz of voices seemed to be increasing in his ears; and then he became conscious of a new fact—that he could no longer see the cards. They swam before him. But still he went on making mistakes every moment with a dumb obstinacy in his abrupt movements, which told the story of his desperation. It was not only that it was too late for him to retrace his steps, though he knew that he was incurring a debt he should never be able to wipe out; but that the old infatuation was upon him, in such a manner that he was not able to resist it—

the old fever of excitement which shook him in all his members, and seemed to make it impossible to leave off.

Six o'clock struck; the two men had taken coffee, and Randal's servant, who had been up so early from concern about his master, looked anxiously at him, and fidgeted about as he came into the room. De Lafargues noticed the expression of the man's face.

"I advise you to leave off," he said, speaking loudly and clearly, in the presence of the servant, looking hard at his friend as he did so, and beginning to wish that he would do as he was desired. "If you go on any further it will be in defiance of my warning, and to tell you the truth, you begin to look queer."

"All right, old fellow, wait till *you* are tired. I've not come to the end of *my* tether," answered Randal, with a hollow laugh, and persuading himself that the next turn of the cards might redeem a portion of his losses. "I know what you think—that I am beginning to funk, but

you commenced this, and *you* must go on with it. I am in my own house, and it shall never be said of me that I was the first to quit the table."

"I admire your English 'pluck,' but, remember, I protest," answered Paul, shrugging his shoulders, and looking at the footman with an expression which said, "Keep your eye on him. I will not be answerable for the consequences.

Nothing was heard now but the ticking of the clock. Five minutes passed, and for the moment an accident gave Randal the advantage.

Five minutes more, and De Lafarges had made cruel retaliation. Eight or ten minutes, and the footman had roused the maids, one of whom brought an early breakfast, but neither of the men could taste it.

With the exception of the egg, De Lafarges has taken nothing but the coffee and a few dry biscuits.

Another few minutes ticked away, and the Welsh servants, who were a good

deal frightened at first, gained boldness from the fact that nobody observed them. They peeped in at the doorway, and sometimes ventured even to show themselves, discussing in faint whispers the probable lunacy of the gentlemen. They had little need to be afraid of their master. Randal neither saw them nor heard them. A mist swam before his eyes, and his throat felt as if it were closed. He was conscious of a quivering of his limbs, and had to help himself to a little more brandy. His lips were as if they were so glued together that it required an effort to open them, and to pronounce the magic words, "spade," "I propose," "your deal," &c.

"Poor wretch, dead beat! I thought he had ten times more 'go' in him," smiled Paul, like a Rhadamanthus, as he watched his antagonist still dealing out the cards in a regular mechanical manner. "It would be cruel to go on long with this. He is making the most absurd mistakes, and can never hold out to the end; but

for *me* me to cut it shorter, now that he has gone so far, would only be to offend against the rules of the game."

Two minutes more. Randal undid his shirt-collar and flung away his necktie; and one of the maids who were watching him ran to open another window. Another half minute—he had become of the colour of a corpse. He felt his remaining strength going, the room began to close upon him. The ceiling dropped slowly, the walls spun round him, the floor began to sink, and with a sensation as if he should go through it, he flung up his arms as if seeking for help, and then fell forward with his head resting on the table.

There was a sudden commotion—a good many exclamations, and a few indignant glances at the "foreignering" gentleman who had been guilty of the mischief.

"It is nothing," said Paul lightly, "a little trifling insensibility. He over-rated his own strength, it was a pity he was so obstinate. But depend upon it, it was

the alcohol and not the card-playing which made him ill. Look at *me*, I am as fresh as when I began to play. We think nothing of this sort of matches in my country. There, put that poisonous stuff away, and carry him up to bed. A bottle or two of soda-water, and then a little sleep. He will be all right again to-morrow morning. I have seen dozens of these cases."

"Can it ever be all right again?" thought Randal, who recovering from his transient fit of faintness, caught the last words of this speech which was not intended for him to hear. "He has me fairly in his clutches, and I no longer trust him. Yet I cannot turn him out of my house now; he can stay here as long as he likes, for he has managed to half ruin me, by chance or by devilry. I am sure I don't know which."

CHAPTER IV.

A BOUT nine o'clock on the following morning Paul de Lafarges, without waiting for an invitation, forced himself into the room of his quondam friend. Randal was lying with his head turned from the window, with his hair matted, his brow damp, his hands clasped upon his forehead, and a peculiar expression of horror in his eyes, which De Lafarges had never seen in any eyes before.

“What sort of a night have I passed?” he repeated, with an unconscious little gesture of disgust, as Paul officiously approached the bedside, and laid his

hand in gentle commiseration upon his pulse. "Why, the Doctor was right when he told me not to excite myself. It is the sort of night I used to pass before I came to Llandyffryn, and this has been worse than all the rest of them, a night of hellish tortures."

"You use words not fit for ears polite," answered Paul, with a smile, but in the foreign accent which he generally carefully avoided. "Why, it's a matter of common sense, you should shut your eyes and keep still. That's an infallible recipe for sleep, or repeat the 'house that Jack built,' or one of your dull poems of Wordsworth, the thing is as easy as possible."

"Easy!" repeated Randal, absently, with a shudder which ran through him, and actually shook him. "Easy, with *that* face all the night by my bedside?"

"Whose face?" laughed Paul. "Something the matter with your nervous system?"

“ Why, the face of that dead man, just as he looked when he shot himself; it haunted me for six months, and I only began to get rid of it when I first met the Gathornes.”

“ Which is the white witch? Can the nymph Egeria exorcise the spectre? It seems to me that you and she have a good deal in common,” laughed Paul, louder than ever; “ but according to my experience dead men keep pretty quiet. Of course, if I had known that the nervous system was so disordered in your case, I shouldn’t have proposed a game of chance. Mind you, I don’t recommend the experiment again.”

“ There is no need to talk about *again*.

I have scrawled an I.O.U. for you; but I have been thinking I ought to tell you honestly and candidly,” continued Randal, taking no further notice of his speech, “ that I shall be unable to defray all my debt to you just at once.”

“ Make yourself easy, I don’t want you to defray it.”

"More's the pity," answered Randal, his face flushing with annoyance, "remember what you yourself said about debts of honour. I can afford to bear my punishment. Do you suppose that I am less honourable than the majority of—gamblers?" he asked bitterly, raising himself, as he spoke, upon his elbow, and looking for the first time fixedly and almost contemptuously at the friend of his boyhood.

"I tell you that you are not sufficiently careful in the choice of your language," answered Paul, with a shrug. "But the case does not rest, as you say, between—gamblers. We played as friends, and I hope we shall always remain friends. I don't want your money."

"What *else* do you want? Men have been known to sell their own bodies, and their very souls for the sake of gambling."

"I should make a bad bargain if I were to purchase your soul. Seeing that no one has yet seen it, that its existence is

problematical, and that, if I possessed it, it might be decidedly hampering to my movements ; I don't think you need be under any anxiety on that score. No, I tell you I trust we may always remain friends, and I only wish you to remember at some future time, when you may possibly be angry with me, that —that you owe me a debt of some sort."

Randal looked at him with astonishment, but he breathed more freely.

"It is your friendship that I value. I do not want to be your enemy, and such a word as 'creditor' ought never to be used between us. A debt of *honour* if you will," he added in a meaning manner. "Some day *I* may seem to owe *you* such a debt, and when that day comes remember we are quits."

Stanton remained silent. He did not in the least understand. Yet his distrust of Paul momentarily increased, and he began to fear in a new way being under this man's power. No slavery, he re-

membered, was so abject as a moral slavery.

“Give me your promise,” continued De Lafarges, lightly; “just a simple promise, that is all I ask for. Suppose I put it down in writing and you sign it? It will save you trouble, and will be done in a moment.”

The combat was still going on in Randal’s mind. He was certain that there was some mystery beneath this airy manner.

“I don’t understand you,” he commenced, “and I don’t like——”

“I daresay you are like Porson, and detest signing anything. But I am the last man to ask for your signature to abstruse articles of faith. This is merely an article of peace, a very common-sense business, and I only exact it because I value your friendship. It may be an excess of precaution against possibilities in the future. But still, if you will humour my weakness, I should like to have it in your writing.”

“Done!” he added, as airily, a few moments afterwards. “I wish all debts of honour could be settled as easily.”

CHAPTER V.

ROSETTE'S spirits were no longer overcast. The Winter seemed very far off with its days of snow, its fogs, its mountain-mists,—or its rain, which, towards the Spring, had fallen in deluges, impeding the traffic, and flooding the roads—so far that it appeared to her like a bad dream. Rosette was ready to spread her wings in the returning sunshine, like one of those butterflies which hibernate in the Winter. When the month of May arrived, she was no longer silent, but became full of merriment as before, coquettish as ever and always changing, so that it was difficult to weary of her variable

moods. Even to Maitland she tried to curb her little sarcasms, her repartees being less frequent, and her pettishness less marked; whilst, for the first time, she began to take a sort of interest in her sister's pursuits, and to make sensible remarks in a desultory way.

“What an idyllic scene! how contented they look!” thought Lafarges one morning, late in the month of May, when he wandered to the Cottage, and found both the sisters busily engaged in gardening. It would have been difficult to say which of the girls looked the brightest. For not only had the aching of Maitland’s heart, when for the first time in her life she had thought it a sad thing to be a woman, also passed away with the glorious Spring days, but the task which had once seemed a task to her, no longer involved self-abnegation. Whilst Randal also was ready to comfort himself with the thought with which so many human beings have lulled their consciences to sleep—“The time will come and *shall* come,” he

said to himself, "when I will atone to everyone for my past weakness."

His physical health had returned to its usual condition, but his distrust of Paul was by no means lessened. For the first time he began to think with a new sort of dread of the unexplained circumstances and past secrets in the life of this man, whom he had so eagerly welcomed to his house—circumstances which came like a wall between them, and made unrestrained friendship impossible. Yet Paul had never seemed more obliging, or more easily contented with innocent amusements, than he was just now.

"I taunted him with being like Mephistopheles. But after all I wronged him," Randal was forced to admit. Perhaps, as he reflected, he had been a little too hard on the friend of his boyhood, who naturally could hardly be expected to take the most severe view of the vices which were treated kindly by the society in which he had been wont to move. Yet he could not help remembering how Gœthe's re-

fined devil moved about with just such a smiling face, when he was meditating how best to insinuate with invisible puncture the poisonous lymph which was to alter more than one constitution. Had he known De Lafarges as well as other men knew him, he might have been sure that he never did anything on impulse, and that all his steps would be premeditated steps. For Paul was by no means an impulsive man, and prided himself on never committing himself to any course of action without a deliberate motive. But in this case he thought he had the motive.

"It would be too absurd," he argued with himself, "to suppose I am succumbing to any *unreasonable* fascination. I always intended to marry an English girl. I long ago tired of Frenchwomen with their shallow complexions, and I should prefer a beautiful girl who could make a figure in society—whilst taking all things together, I should certainly like one who had had an English bringing up. I am by no means

outlandish in my notions ; but if I marry a handsome woman, she must never get talked about—that is essential. Now this good fellow sends me pressing invitations to come here, and then exposes me—in such a solitude that one might fall in love with a negress—to continual tête-à-têtes with an exquisite little creature, who is fascinating as well as beautiful, whose beauty can bear daylight ; who has just sufficient cleverness, without having an intellect which might keep her from being subservient to my will ; and whose relations are so poor that when she becomes my wife she can be cut aloof from them as completely as if they never existed. Does he suppose that in this fortunate combination there is nothing to attract me—that I am not made of flesh and blood—or that I am so immaculate that I am to come triumphantly out of such an ordeal ? No, I am only waiting for circumstances—circumstances have always favoured me.”

He had not to wait long. For being

always on the watch, it so happened that a few weeks afterwards, on a morning in the beginning of June, having espied a graceful figure from the window of his bed-room, and stepping covertly along in search of it, he came upon the unusual sight of Rosette—who prided herself on never shedding a tear, and who always declared she had a particular objection to reducing her eyes to the boiled gooseberry condition—lying alone in a shady hollow filled with heather and plumpy ferns, which half enveloped her and hid her, as she thought, from passers by—her hat tossed listlessly off her head, and the head buried in her hands in an abandonment of grief. Grief—unless it were a form of ennui, from which the girl had never suffered since the arrival of De Lafarges—seemed to have so little in common with Rosette that Paul stopped for a moment, positively startled.

But it was not his way to be taken aback, and he said, as she looked up from

her tears, endeavouring in vain to hide her embarrassment.

“I know I am often an awkward bungler—that my hackneyed words and tiresome phrases may often be an annoyance to you; but believe me—though you are so young, that in comparison with you I may seem very heavy and dull—yet I can most truly sympathise with you—I followed you from far off, because I knew you were in trouble. Let me entreat you for once to look upon me as a friend.”

“You *knew?*” she repeated, darting one of her most appealing looks from beneath her long, wet eye-lashes. “How could anyone know I was here?”

“You can *ask?*” he answered seriously. “Cannot you guess that I should know if you entered the room ever so noiselessly, though I stood with my back turned—and that a secret instinct seemed to tell me that you were here?”

“What is it?” she asked, taken with one of those little fits of nervous laughter,

which women find so useful in difficult positions. "Is it what they call animal magnetism?"

"Do not look away from me;" he implored; "give me another of those looks of yours—a look which if it is only an instantaneous glance, may yet be one of those dazzling glances which illuminate the darkest nights."

"Don't talk nonsense;" she answered, with her delicate colour deepening; "as if it were likely I could tell *you* a tiresome little worry which I have not told to anyone."

"And why not?"

"Because not any of them can help me."

"Does it follow that *I* cannot?"

"I tell you it is so trivial—I should be ashamed to talk to you about it. It is simply a money trouble. Aunt ought to have been ashamed of herself to let them worry me about it. It is only her spite, because she wants to revenge herself. I would not marry a prig of a man she picked

out for my husband—or she would gladly have paid anything—anything. But how can I tell papa, who has debts of his own, or poor Maitland, who works so hard already, and who has such severe notions of these things—or—or—Mr. Stanton,” she continued more slowly, “who has already lent them more than he can properly spare. Oh, why,” she added, with another petulant burst of tears, “why was there ever such a thing as money in this world—or why were we not rich?—it must be somebody’s fault.”

“So,” he said with a smile, which he kept from verging into a sneer, “it is only a dun;—you are troubling yourself about nothing—”

“Only,” she repeated, opening wondering rounded orbs; “only, when a man writes me a rude insulting letter and says he must have a hundred pounds before next Saturday. Oh, why should I be so insulted, when aunt ought to have paid it?”

“Of course, she gave you an allow-

ance, when you were so kind as to live with her."

"She gave me fifty pounds a-year."

"She ought to have been ashamed of herself."

"It seemed a fortune to Maitland—she would wonder what I had done with it."

"Would she? But then she is not particular about dress. It is not *her* fault, but I pity a woman who doesn't know how to dress. Your aunt, if she were not a screw, should have made the thing a hundred, and you could have spent more, I daresay."

"I don't think I was extravagant."

"No, of course you were not, you will have much more some day. And whatever this fellow wants I shall be glad to lend it to you meanwhile."

"It is very good of you," she answered in the voice of the charmer.

"Not good of me at all, pray think nothing about it. Do you suppose I could bear to have friends of mine insulted by

low impudent fellows, who write to them and threaten them about money? If you will only give me the letter, you need think no more about it."

"I don't like you to see it."

"See it! as if these things don't happen every day. *I* am not likely to magnify every gnat into a camel. I know too much of the world," he continued, with a curious smile, "and I trust you may never have more on your conscience than these innocent little debts."

"You will not tell Maitland; I should die if she knew of it?"

"I? why, of course not," he answered with a repetition of the curious smile. "I am well aware that we should not look at these things from the same end of the telescope, and, to tell you the truth, I sometimes wonder how you can submit to be treated as she sometimes treats you."

The pretty eyes were opened again in rounder wonder.

“Do you dispute it? Why, of course, it is not evident on the surface, but any one can remark her tone of quiet superiority. Was she not once a governess or something of the kind?”

“A pupil-teacher at a school where she was so great a favourite that they said the younger girls made greater progress with her than with any of the masters. I have heard people say she taught with that sort of enthusiasm that, whether it was drawing, music, or anything else, she turned it into a pleasure.”

“It is very kind and disinterested of you to stand up so in praise of a sister who occasionally snubs you,” he answered in his airy manner. “But she and I were born under different stars. She is the sort of woman” he added, touching upon a sore point, “who finds it easy to call the men who differ from her Infidels, and to deny them the privilege of private reason and judgment.”

As religion was a matter about which Rosette never troubled herself, she did not

contradict this assertion, and though it struck her with a sort of surprise that, when she herself had so often ridiculed Maitland, a looker-on should think that the snubbing was all on one side, yet it also threw a new light upon the subject, and she felt nothing loth to be furnished with a grievance, or with power of quoting De Lafarges' words when the occasion offered.

She was in no position just then to dispute with Paul. For she was in a dilemma, and though the means offered to her of escape from the dilemma had something equivocal about it, yet it was the easiest way of relieving herself from present difficulties; and Rosette was not a woman to perplex herself about the future.

The cheque was paid; the tiresome creditor silenced. And if from that day Rosette's relations with the two men who were brought constantly in contact with her, became, as she was forced to admit, a little puzzling, she comforted herself by

remembering that they were not after all more puzzling than other adventures of her life. Had she ever analysed her feelings, she would have confessed to herself that she liked the excitement of playing them off, one against the other, like rival knights upon a chess-board.

The greatest difficulty was to prevent them from coming into collision, and this difficulty was increased by a fear she could by no means have defined, of Paul. From the hour that he had lent her the money, he had determined to become her master, and was somewhat irritated by discovering that she occasionally avoided him. He tried to fall into the old *tête-à-têtes* during their rides together on horse-back, but she—who was becoming more used to the exercise—no longer needed his guidance. On one occasion when he was more persistent than usual in his attempts, she balked him by suddenly sending her horse into a gallop.

So quickly was the manœuvre executed,

and so entirely out of keeping was it with Rosette's usual timidity, that Randal, a little alarmed, rode up in dismay, and touched De Lafarges' shoulder in sudden anxiety.

"Do you know anything about it? Where is she going?" he asked.

Paul answered with a vague gesture, and an attempted smile.

"We must stop her," Randal continued, "it is not safe."

"Go after her at your peril!" said De Lafarges, with sudden vehemence. "You do not know the horse as I do. You might frighten it instead of helping her. Her seat is not a good one, and we are near the top of the hill."

He left Randal, with face working and lips white, to follow slowly in horror, as he flicked his own horse with the whip, with a determined air, and set off rapidly in the direction of the fugitive. It had suited his purpose to exaggerate the danger, though he well knew that Rosette had no fancy for reckless riding, and he was

not at all surprised to find her at the turn of the hill, seated in her most graceful attitude, waiting for the others to come up.

"Since you have gone so far, we had better go on to the Torrent Walk. I shall know how to believe in future in your slow riding. We can do it, and come back to the others before they miss us," he said in an off-hand manner, admiring, as he spoke, the pretty turn of the head, and its graceful pose on the neck, as Rosette did not move to look at him.

She started at the sound of his voice, and said,

"I don't wish to go any further."

"Of course I am always at your orders, but—"

"We must keep with the others," she interrupted with a feeble attempt at an authoritative gesture.

It put his blood up, he who had determined to master her.

"I am afraid it is too late," he said coolly, "we are already by ourselves."

He saw that her hands trembled as she held the bridle, and it increased his resolution to make her feel that he was conqueror.

“Do you suppose that I can resist the pleasure of having you for a little time all to myself? Only for a little time,” he continued, in a voice which trembled with excitement at the emergency. “It cannot hurt anyone, they think you have already fled. Come, you had better give way at once.”

In such a moment many a woman would have been superb in her indignation. But flattered vanity and an unacknowledged fear contended for the mastery in Rosette’s breast.

“Not so quick. Do you want to run away with me?” she said with a little dry laugh, which by no means hid her embarrassment. For her words came too late. He had already struck his own horse lightly, and Rosette, breathless and confounded, yet having no choice but that of following his lead, found herself

cantering over loose stones in the direction of the Torrent Walk.

"It is not safe," she cried, "it is horrible of you; they will notice our absence."

But her entreaties were borne away by the wind, he only laughing in reply, "I can't help it if they do, *I* can take care of you."

"You see it is all right," he said, about an hour afterwards, laughing, when he lifted her, pale and exhausted, from her horse, and bade her rest upon a mossy rock, in view of the magnificent foliage, and brown water leaping over smooth grey stones, till here and there it was churned into a snow-flecked waterfall, which formed one of the greatest attractions of the country, some miles away from Llandyffryn.

"No, it is *not* all right, and I don't want to look at it. It is wrong, very wrong; you are taking a great liberty with me," she said, her anger increasing.

"I have had my own way. I am

generally used to it," he answered very quickly, "but now it is *your* turn. What do you wish me to do?"

"Leave me, or take me back. You know Maitland will be frightened about me, and Randal—"

"Randal!" he repeated in a mocking tone. "He does not deserve thinking about. He ought to have taken better care of you himself. But you had better not be excited about it, the people round will notice us, and as soon as you have rested, of course I will take you back."

CHAPTER VI.

"WE both of us had a narrow escape of breaking our necks—your sister could not help it, but she will be wiser next time," said Paul quietly, as he brought Rosette home a few hours afterwards.

An accomplished and successful lie was to him a proper feat in strategy. But he unconsciously shrank from the quiet, perplexed, investigating gaze of Maitland's eyes.

She was not, as he said, conscious of superiority, but she was more and more convinced that she did not like Randal's

friend; her purity detected the presence of some evil which she did not understand.

“I don’t like to disbelieve him,” she said to herself, dropping the searching eyes; “and especially I do not like to think that Rosette should share an untruth by not contradicting it.”

But after twenty-four hours there was no more room for doubt. Mrs. Bathurst had been by an accident at a picnic at the Torrent Walk, and Mrs. Bathurst had said to her privately.

“*You are the elder sister, and you should look after that girl. She is wild and wayward enough, but this is worse than wayward. She will get herself into some scrape, if she ventures so many miles from home in company with a perfect stranger.*”

Maitland went a little paler, and answered stammering, “I believe—they said—the horses ran away.”

“Horses—fudge! they ran away themselves if you like it,” said the indignant

matron, with an angry sniff; and then after a pause she added, laconically, "I detest lies—big and small!"

So did Maitland—whose tell-tale blood was spreading over her neck and face, and whose eyes were filling with tears which she would willingly have hidden from her kindly neighbour.

"There—don't vex yourself about it. I'm not the one to talk," said Mrs. Bathurst, whose gossiping was proverbial in the neighbourhood. "But the sooner you get that sister of yours married, the better. I don't like that new visitor of Mr. Stanton's. He reminds me of a hawk, and a proper English dove ought to tremble at his presence. I hate a man who can't look you straight in the face—who shuns good subjects as he does, and talks all sorts of French rubbish."

"Perhaps you hate him because he is a foreigner—surely that is scarcely just. The best and most catholic of English people have prejudices," suggested Maitland smiling faintly. "But he says he is

not a Frenchman. He prides himself on being separate from all Nationalities."

"All the worse for him, my dear," nodded the lady emphatically; "a man has no more right to fancy himself separate from his country than he has to fancy himself separate from other limitations—from his wife and children if he has any, which is just as likely as not. Depend upon it *his* ways are not our ways. And when you find it out, as you will by and by, for yourself—don't say *I* have not given you warning—that's all."

Maitland's task was a heavy one. But after she parted with Mrs. Bathurst, she took it up boldly and straightforwardly, as she did all other burdens; but she did not take it up without shrinking painfully. To remonstrate with Rosette—to seem to interfere with her freedom—and above all to reason with her, when the girl prided herself on having nothing to do with reason, was a task which might have seemed hopeless to a mother, or to a "grannie," as she was called in derision. But the

elder sister was alarmed when she came to think of it, at the noticeable alteration in Rosette's manner. A little while ago the girl's mind had been occupied with all-important questions concerning the intricacies of her trousseau—how she was to get it—who was to pay for it—whether she should accept it as a gift from Mr. Stanton, and if so, how much she should ask for as being imperatively necessary? A little while ago she had been constantly lamenting the fact that, owing to their limited acquaintance at Llandyffryn, she should receive but a small number of wedding-presents, and should miss the sugar basins, card cases, teapots, butter boats, fish knives, paper cutters, ink-stands, and the usual dazzling display of knicknacks, to say nothing of the crowded church and the train of bridesmaids which, under other circumstances, she should have had a right to expect. Latterly these bewildering questions seemed to have faded into utter insignificance. Rosette was so amused and occupied that she

never now complained of dulness, but what was certainly more suspicious was that she never alluded to the necessary pomp of her approaching marriage.

Then there was another fact which Maitland could not think of without hot cheeks—that once before she had heard through the gossiping tongues at Llanyffryn, of Rosette having a clandestine meeting with Paul de Lafarges. She had attributed that tale to spite and exaggeration, but it *did* strike her that there must be something underhand in all this.

“I could not believe that she would meet him clandestinely, and yet if they planned that expedition together to the Torrent Walk—it was false of them—terribly false,” she thought. “*He* may be only amusing himself, but it must hurt Rosette cruelly; such false beginnings have woven a mesh round many a conscience—sooner or later leading to an agony of concealment—the very best thing is that Mrs. Bathurst should have detected it in the beginning.”

She judged Rosette from herself, when she pitied her in this way, and supposed that she must be suffering from an “ agony of concealment.”

Rosette heard her sister’s remonstrances with eyes rounded with wonderment—with a look of non-comprehension, and a shrug of her pretty shoulders. If her mental condition was not that of infantine idiocy, there was a wonderful fidelity to nature in the skilful imitation.

“ Really ! I don’t know what it is all about. It was not *I* who told an ‘ untruth’ as you choose to call it. *I* could not help it—my horse followed his, and if Mr. De Lafarges did tell a little fib to prevent a fuss, you must not blame him too much. I don’t suppose he could help it,” she added, with a conscious smile which provoked Maitland more than her assumed indifference. She knew instinctively that a woman of Rosette’s stamp could always forgive a lover for imprudence caused by excess of admiration for herself.

She looked so pretty as she stood tapping her little foot on the floor, with that expression of merriment dimpling her cheeks, and the light flashing from the windows of her eyes, that though Maitland felt for the first time angry and indignant with her for her fatal beauty, yet she said to herself with a sigh of despair,

“No, it is true. I can’t blame the men too much, they are all attracted by her.”

Aloud she said,

“Ah, how I wish you were a little more discreet. If Randal hears of this, how do you expect him to bear it?”

“He must have very stupid notions, if he is vexed about such a thing,” she answered, with a toss of her graceful little head. “Really, when I consider what a short time I have known him, it would be quite absurd of him to make a fuss about nothing,” she added pouting.

It was now Maitland's turn to open her eyes widely ; for though her sister's indifference had displeased her before, she had never hitherto suspected her of changeableness.

" You are speaking in riddles," she said. " I *did* think you cared for Randal a little. It cannot be I have made a mistake."

" Nonsense ! there are no riddles to read. I have never pretended to be impressionable."

" Never pretended to care for the man you promised to marry ?"

" Not in the way you mean."

" The way a girl *ought* to feel when she is engaged."

" I don't know about oughts. And as to being engaged. I have been what you call *half* engaged once or twice before. But I don't suppose I have ever been what people call in love. I have not got it in me. I have nothing heroic about me. I never could work myself up into ecstasies of any kind."

"I was not talking about ecstasies," said Maitland, a little wearily.

"Well, then, I want you to understand I am quite different from you. How can I help it? I was born so! I never could work myself up into violent feelings—if you like that word better than ecstasies—violent feelings of any kind."

"But it is no question of violent feelings," exclaimed Maitland, in desperation. "Look here. Let us put the thing steadily before us—let us look it soberly and honestly in the face. Put before yourself the case of a woman—I have been told there are such women, though I can scarcely say I have hitherto believed in their existence—a woman selfish enough and vain enough to make a man fall in love with her, to torture him a little as she has tortured other victims, and then to let him go, maimed and injured, with a pretty pretence of thoughtlessness, or perhaps the excuse of another engagement. A woman of this

sort may pity the man she has injured, may like him all the better for not being able to get over his disappointment, and it may never occur to her that her conduct may be unworthy of her. But what is it in reality, when it is stripped of its nonsense? Is it not mean? is it not contemptible? almost another sort of murder."

"I don't know what you are talking about; I didn't come home to be lectured," answered Rosette, still imperturbable, except for a passing recollection of De Lafarges' idea that her sister snubbed her. "I told you that you and I are different. Then why can't we agree to differ? I don't see why I should be snubbed because I can't help making myself agreeable. I can't help it if I have the power of making most people like me, people who are not unkind," she added, with a little shrug. "But it is always harder to retain the good opinion of women—women who will impute odd motives to other women."

She said this with a yawn and an affection of carelessness which made Maitland hopelessly turn away. And this was the girl whom Randal was determined to endow with all sorts of imaginary feelings.

Would he ever come to know that she had one of those weak and changeable dispositions—light and elastic—which were never formed to bear the burden of a strong affection? Such an affection would have been too weighty for Rosette—she would sink beneath it like a willow-tree; she would not have strength to support it for a week. And she knew nothing of the existence of sorrow, by which greater natures than hers had been purged and purified. But when in one of her gay moods, she said, half apologetically, a few hours afterwards, “ You mustn’t blame me too much—if I am not very serious. I have been the plaything of chance, I think, from the cradle, and to tell you the truth, I believe in Fortune turning

her wheel, as the Turks believe in kismet—" Maitland gave up all idea of attempting further argument, and began to consider in what other way she could most effectually help her.

There seemed to be no way but one, and that was horrible and distasteful to her.

De Lafarges was never more astonished in his life than he was a few days afterwards, when he found Miss Gathorne apparently waiting to waylay him in the avenue of yew-trees leading from the church, and when, instead of shrinking from walking with him alone, as she had sometimes done before, like an unreasoning mimosa, she actually stopped him, when he was about to pass on, saying,

"Will you allow me to have a few minutes' conversation with you?"

"Certainly," said Paul, raising his eyebrows, and looking at her with an expression of wonder; "nothing could give me greater pleasure."

“How is it,” she asked, looking him earnestly in the face, and plunging at once *in medias res*, “how is it, if you came here especially for your health, and because, as I understood, you were suffering from weakness, you are able to join in all our long country expeditions, and to fatigue yourself by so constantly walking to our Cottage? And how is it that when you said you were generally busy, and that important matters were likely to recall you to France, you yet can linger here during the Summer months, and have so many hours of leisure? Excuse me for asking you,” she continued, slowly and steadily, with no tremulousness of tone, and no dropping of the eyes that seemed to sift him through and through; “I do not ask from motives of curiosity, but from a motive which very nearly concerns me.”

Paul had gone through several stages of feeling during this unusual catechising, but he who prided himself on being always master of a situation, had determined

before she concluded to put her off with a compliment.

"I will be honest with *you*, as you are so plain-spoken with *me*," he said, with a little gesture of surprise; "I will tell you that you are one of the rare women who, in candour and simplicity, represent an unusual type, with which I have not hitherto been familiar. But excuse me, if I decline to answer your questions. You are puzzled by my conduct—it is not what you expected. Well, you, also, are an enigma of which I seek the key—a very attractive enigma; but I do not attempt to examine you as if you were in a witness-box."

"Is there not another enigma which attracts you?" she asked, gravely, her colour coming and going—but determined to maintain her ground. "Do not let us fall into flattering conventionalities. *You* know and *I* know that it is beauty which attracts you, and I have not the slightest pretension to that beauty. It is different with my sister. She has a

charm of her own which may compete successfully with the charms of those flowers of a more artificial society, nursed in hot-house civilization, of which you may be weary. My sister has attractions which may be not often met with at Paris, Vienna, Baden, or Monaco."

"You are certainly very plain-spoken," he muttered, his lip curling for the first time with something like a sneer.

"Yes, pardon me for speaking frankly. She is on the eve of her marriage, and she has no mother. You are surely not serious in the attentions you are paying her. Mr. Stanton is your friend. And you have too much judgment and good sense not to understand that, if you prolong those attentions, you may either make yourself ridiculous or compromise her."

Her tone was so firm and simple that he could not mistake it. He was amused with her for having so cleverly taken time by the forelock, but not in the least daunted by the harmless lightning in her

eyes. He bowed without any appearance of anger, and said, resisting his inclination to laugh outright,

“ I must not so far forget my manners as to contradict a lady in her pretty little theory. But my attentions to your sister have been a matter of course. She is, as you say, beautiful, I admire her as I admire the flowers. Stanton would scarcely be so selfish as to put her in a band-box—or under a glass-case—to keep her all to himself. But let me remind you that on the Continent we all sacrifice to the Graces. If we are serious in the morning we are frivolous in the evening, and when we are holiday-keeping, we are always frivolous. You in England are a grave race—you interpret things so literally, that we cannot admire beauty without being supposed to have ‘ intentions.’ And so—so you think I might employ my time more usefully ? ”

And then, as if he could no longer restrain his merriment, he put his hands to his sides, and indulged in the pent up

merriment, laughing so long and so heartily that the tears literally came into his eyes.

“The Torrent Walk!” he said, when his laughter, during which she had tried to speak to him, had somewhat abated. “Our ride on horseback—and Mrs. Bathurst’s spitefulness! Ah, now I begin to understand, there is no country where women are so spiteful to each other as they are in England, and what they call scandal, why, it sticks like a bur—a hundred burs if you will, and we cannot get them off. Poor Mademoiselle, it was a little escapade of hers—a childish fancy to run off to the Torrent Walk—only I went after her to take care of her. If Mrs. Bathurst says any more, tell her it was Randal who sent me.”

And he and Maitland parted, she but half satisfied, and he saying to himself,

“I must play my game carefully. Who would have thought that girl capable of such a resolution? Quiet, reserved, timid even, she confronts a man as if she were

a Rhadamanthus, and takes him solemnly to task. 'Still waters,' you know. Well, I have got out of it better than could be expected."

CHAPTER VII.

IT was some days after this before De Lafarges met Rosette under circumstances in which it was safe to address her.

Dread, partly of her sister's espionage, and partly of the strange power which this bold man had begun to exercise over her, had kept her more of a prisoner to the house than usual. But Rosette was not accustomed to be hampered by difficulties, and early one day, when the beauty of the morning tempted her, she was out in the neighbouring woods, gathering flowers and leaves, and stopping now and then to admire the ribbons of

sunlight which streaked the carpet of moss beneath her nimble feet. Ecstasies, as she said, were not much in her way, but the air and sunshine had raised her spirits, She was overflowing with youthful gladness, and wished she had a companion with whom she could exchange laughing words of good fellowship, so that she might have an excuse for making the woods echo with her laughter. Paul was not exactly the companion she wished for at that moment. Paul, whose face wore its dominant expression, seemed to know where she was as if by instinct, not of course telling her that he had set a servant to watch her movements. He found her beneath the shade of the fir trees, with a bundle of wild flowers lying upon her lap, from which she was picking the petals, and tossing them idly away from her. She did not glance up at him as if she were pleased, and he revenged himself on the branch of a pine-tree which barred his passage to her, and then looked at her almost frowningly as he

came towards her. She saw him perfectly well, without seeming to look at him. What was the good of being a woman if you had to look to see ?

He was determined to command her attention, and the mocking expression died away from her pretty lips, as he said in a tone of authority,

“ Nobody can interrupt us here, and now at least you will be able to answer the question which I addressed to you in my last letter.”

“ I can’t answer it just now,” she said, trying to look defiant, and to escape from him up a path which led to the border of a ravine. “ You must give me time; you see I am supposed to be engaged to Randal, and it is not possible for me to marry you both.”

“ I wonder you submit to this thralldom. Your sister is harsh and severe ;” he said, following her without hesitation up the incline. “ Your supposed lover does not value you. They would both of them be ready enough to blame you for the steps

which you have already innocently taken, steps which cannot be retraced—there is no returning."

She was no longer defiant, but spoke in a faltering way.

"Why did you make me write to you? You ought to return my letters. To look at you one would think you were an admirer of our sex; but you are not, you are very hard—very tyrannical."

"A monster of cruelty!" he said, relaxing into a smile. "Would you like me better if I were like that milk-and-water Stanton?"

"No, I like a man to be a man. What makes him so weak?" she said, almost meditatively, taking courage again as the menacing look disappeared from Paul's face, and he began to heap upon her his usual words of exaggerated praise. The path which she had taken in her alarm, when she dropped her nosegay, was cut out in the rock, and the hollow which it overhung, resembled the fosse of some ancient castle. A stream flowed at the

bottom of it, making a melancholy murmuring—a stream bordered with meadow-sweet, which filled the air with incense, as if you were in a foreign cathedral. The path soon narrowed, so that two persons could scarcely walk abreast, and Rosette, always timid, only ventured on with lingering steps.

“In another week,” he said presently, “I must have an answer to my letter.”

“Nonsense,” she answered, laughingly, “let us trust to time to cut the Gordian knot for us. *I* always trust to time; and then, you know, whatever *I* may think, they will say that you are trifling with me. I hear that you have trifled with almost everyone.”

The path grew narrower still as she answered him, so narrow that she was afraid for him, since he insisted on walking on the outside.

She did not like to show that she was afraid for him, but she halted to keep herself from turning giddy, and deter-

mined to insist on a return to the cottage.

At the same moment her eye fell upon a rare flower, belonging to the tribe of orchids, which grew hanging over the abyss, and hoping to change the subject of the conversation, she stopped and pointed it out to Paul, with the words,

“Isn’t it a beauty? I never saw one like it before.”

In another moment she held her breath and stood riveted to the spot, as her companion without answering her, swung himself with a rapid movement over the perilous height, clinging to the grass with his hands and feet. She shut her eyes, that she might not see him hanging during that breathless moment over the terrible descent, and knew no more till he returned to her with no bone broken, only a trifle paler and with a few scratches on his hands and face—and handed her the flower with a smile that seemed to say,

“ So much for my *trifling*. See how I value your slightest wish.”

She remained for another minute dumb, motionless and trembling, seeing nothing and being aware of nothing either around her, or in her own heart. He knew that she was afraid and profoundly troubled, and that a darkness in which she could not reason was all around her; and when at last, conquering her confusion she began to sob with returning breath, which was slightly spasmodic, he contented himself with firmly repeating his words,

“ In another week I shall expect your answer.”

She was trying to control her nervous trembling, conscious of the apparent violence of her emotion, and yet knowing that that emotion was caused less by sympathy for his danger than by the terrified repulsion which she always felt to anything like physical peril. Paul had had an English athletic training, and could climb like an adept of the Alpine Club. But she was half-indignant with the man

who sought to astonish and trouble her by trying his experiments in this way upon her. Was he always to make her acknowledge his superior power? and was her heart to be like a docile instrument on which he was to play at his pleasure any air which his caprice suggested to him? She was frightened at him, and began to believe all the stories which the villagers made up about him. She began to feel as if there might be depths in his soul as terrible as the abyss over which she had seen him hanging, and as if over that abyss floated her life.

"Oh, how could you do it? What a determined man you are! What am I to do?" she exclaimed inconsequently, with tears.

"Do? why, the only thing that you can do. Promise to be my wife," he answered with a triumphant smile, as she stood wringing her hands, and repeating, "What am I to do?" every fresh protest being a sort of prop by which she strove to stay her flagging resolution. Rosette

was certainly not like her usual unthinking self, and he who was always accustomed to consider that even the flat denial of a woman covered, in nine cases out of ten, a willing affirmative, looked at her with a meaning smile, as she stood wringing her pretty hands, hot and excited, with actual tears coming into her eyes, and told himself that capitulation could not be far off.

“Are you in earnest?” she asked presently, with a little return of her usual coquettish manner, “or have you an attack of fever?”

Of course he repeated that he was terribly in earnest, urging the old arguments of the dullness of her home in Wales, and the attractions which awaited her in the outer world.

Even then she gave her head one of its pretty shakes, saying inconsistently.

“Providence has made my life so easy that I am not sure after all I wish to change it. I like to see the sea, but I don’t want to swim in it.”

“ You would if you knew how to swim,” he laughed, certain of his success.

So triumphant was he in this certainty that he began to relax some of the vigilance he had hitherto thought it necessary to preserve in Maitland’s presence. When the little fluttering bird, which he intended to capture, lay so ready to hand, he told himself that the stratagems of a hundred elder sisters could do nothing to prevent its being snared by the fowler. *His* nerves were unusually strong, but it had needed no superhuman skill for him to discover that Rosette was a coward, fearful of horses, terrified at shadows, shuddering at the merest allusion to death, and on that coward fear it now pleased him to work.

On one occasion, knowing nothing of the precipices in the neighbourhood, he even risked a greater danger than he himself intended. The same bold and venturesome skill which made him a successful card-player, and which had induced him on a previous evening to

terrify Rosette out of her senses, by daring, in the presence of her sister and her accepted lover, to pick up a letter from the ground which he pretended the girl had dropped, and to present her with it openly, though she saw it was in his own handwriting, made him recklessly attempt another unconsciously cruel experiment.

For in one of their excursions in the neighbourhood of Barfordd, he out-walked Randal and Maitland—who had again hampered themselves by giving Steenie a treat, and were wheeling the boy in his chair—and seeing a little devious path up the grassy face of the cliff he pointed it out to Rosette, and persuaded her to follow it.

“I have a word to say to you,” he whispered, “and it will be a capital excuse. None of them can blame us for taking the short cut.”

“But how do you know it is safe?” answered Rosette, doubtfully.

“I have just asked one of those

cottagers, and he assures me it is all right."

"The Welsh peasants are like goats."

"Are they? I don't believe it, the path will save us a tiresome round. Besides, you know, if they are like goats, *I* am like a chamois hunter—I am as good as any Swiss guide. Don't you remember," he continued with a little smile, "I can lift you like a feather when there is any difficulty."

"As you did over the stream," she said, returning the smile with a conscious look. "And how angry I was with you! You had better not attempt the experiment twice."

They talked as they went on, the path looking alluring enough at first, as it wound on over the green turf amidst the yellow gorse. She put her little gloved hand on his shoulder, and now and then he half-lifted her over stony places. It was only as they went on that the real difficulties of the path increased, and soon became so great as to absorb their

attention. The little track worn in the short grass by the feet of the peasants, became fainter and fainter, till it seemed only fit for the wild goats of which Rosette had spoken. And even Paul himself began to look grave when it was lost altogether on the naked rocks.

“Don’t look back;” he said to Rosette, “it is as easy as possible to go on, only you had better not look back just at present.”

The caution was needed, for—looking down as he did—the declivity seemed to be almost vertical. They had lost sight of the beach, and the metallic glitter of the sea, with one white sail floating on it beneath them, gave an eerie impression, as if they were suspended like a couple of eagles in mid-air. The descent would have been almost impossible, and so with one arm supporting Rosette, and interposing his own figure—in such a way that she could not possibly look back in the moments when he stopped for the neces-

sity of taking breath—Paul toiled on, bearing the double weight, but beginning to fear that he had over-estimated his own strength, and a good deal dazzled at times by the great vistas which opened beneath him, causing a new and strange sensation of vertigo.

Yet he tried to encourage her, whispering,

“If you were the Princess in the ballad, and I that Norman youth who had to win her by carrying her up to the top of the mountain, I believe I should succeed in the attempt without draining any philtre to renew my strength.”

So he walked on for some minutes with a sort of feverish determination, and with all his attention concentrated on the girl, for whom he now and then found a platform where she could wait and rest.

Suddenly she called to him in a tone of horror.

“I can’t go on any more, I know I shall fall.”

“No, you will not,” he said. “Don’t

be flurried; remember *I* am here. I am taking care of you."

"But I can't, oh, I can't, my head is turning round."

"I assure you it is *perfectly* safe. You are as safe as if you were in your bed," he answered, with knit brows and compressed lips, though at the same time he forced a laugh. "See how easily I can move about," he added, descending some steps as he spoke, and coming back again at the risk, as it seemed to her, of precipitating himself some thousands of feet over the dizzy depths beneath them into the sea.

"You—you have nerves of iron," she said with a shudder.

"Why, you don't mean to say you are frightened? a courageous woman like you—we are close upon the top."

"The top of the cliff; we shall never reach it,—never,—without wings."

He took her hand again, but the throb of the femoral artery was pulsing so that

it reminded him, now almost too forcibly, of a poor captured bird.

"I shall die," she moaned feebly.

"No, you will not," he said in a cheerful voice—a voice which had a ring of triumph in it, in spite of the perilous ascent, as the situation forced itself on him with ghastly distinctness. "You are too valuable to *me*; you will live many years yet, you are too precious to die. Hold tightly to me."

He strode on, straining every nerve, supporting her, almost fainting to the summit. Fortunately for him the soil was dry, so that he could get a firm footing on it. Had the shaly surface been moistened by ever such a superficial wetting, his feet would have slipped upon it, and he could never have reached the level ground.

"You are sure we can get up?" she inquired, wildly, as she saw him trying to climb up the steep preparatory slope on the verge of the summit. And then she closed her eyes helplessly, as he

clasped his arms firmly round her and answered,

“All right!” in a re-assuring tone, though the drops of perspiration from the effort he was making, began to bead his brow.

He was not all bad. He forgot his own bodily danger, and felt his heart beat with a pure and disinterested joy, at the moment when he had the delight of placing her on a solid platform of rock, a sort of narrow esplanade bordering the façade of the cliff.

“It is all right,” he shouted again, “you have nothing more to be afraid of.”

She heard him and remembered nothing but her safety. Her head fell slowly forward on her bosom, for the relief was too great for her, and for a few moments she lapsed into unconsciousness. And then, when she slowly raised her face, her agitation had calmed, but she had forgotten herself as in a dream, and looked at him with a long wondering gaze.

"We are safe," he repeated. "My darling, don't be afraid. I am not going to make any feeble maunderings, all words would be inadequate to explain what I feel. But you are *mine*—mine for ever. Nothing can separate you from me."

CHAPTER VIII.

“YOU will not tell them anything about it,” said Rosette, a few minutes afterwards, in a tone of pitiful protest.

“Of course not, dearest—not if you really wish me to keep it secret. Nothing could please me better.”

They were sitting on the grassy summit of the cliff, where Maitland—who had been the first to miss them, and who, knowing the dangers of the precipitous path, had made some excuse for hurrying on to meet them, without betraying her fears to Randal or Stephen—found them to her great relief; Rosette still looking

pale, but trying to appear as if nothing had happened.

“Oh, you gave us such a fright!” she began, impulsively, and then stopped, reading the troubled meaning in her sister’s downcast face. “I did not dare to tell Mr. Stanton how anxious I was,” she said after a pause, during which Rosette, whose late terrors seemed to have deprived her of her usual aplomb, coloured deeply, as if aware of her self-betrayal.

“Stanton has got over worse alarms in his life time,” said Paul, tightening his lips, and throwing a stone carelessly over the cliffs. The absurdity of their fastening Stanton upon Rosette occurred to him more forcibly at that moment than it had ever done before.

There was another awkward pause, during which Maitland watched the colour coming and going in Rosette’s cheeks, and the fear which the little flirt began to feel not only of her position, but of De Lafarges himself, became so overwhelming to her that she was inclined to cry.

“Perhaps I can help you—perhaps I can advise,” said the elder sister, pleadingly, when she had her alone that evening, in a tone which no one could have interpreted as being either unkind, or despotic. But Rosette winced, as if she could not bear the penetrating steadiness of her eyes.

“There is nothing for you to advise me about,” she said, suddenly flaming up. For she felt she had been sorely tried, and yet she was not courageous enough to think of confiding in anyone. Her manner rather strengthened than weakened Maitland’s doubt, who looked at her with sad eyes constrained and silent; and then Rosette added indignantly with that new irritating sense of perplexing difficulties.

“It is the way with you to think the worst of everyone; you are quick-eyed enough to the least faults in other people.”

“Am I?” said the elder sister, the earnest eyes growing dim,—as she remem-

bered how her own little cup of happiness had been spilled, and thought of the love which had expired so hardly, and through such bitter throes, that merely to look back on it, reminded her of a sickening disease—"Am I?" reminding herself that this was one of the girlish stabs which ought to have no effect on her; and that she should have learned self-command in the school of suffering. "Then there is no meaning in my Christianity, for that teaches me to forgive."

The answer touched Rosette, who looked up, and patted her feet, as her manner was when she was vexed, impatiently on the floor.

"Don't you see I am put out?" she said; "why *will* you attach such importance to my little passing speeches?"

"If I take your speeches in earnest, it is my way;" answered the elder sister. "I am plain-spoken myself—and used to plain-spoken people."

"And I hate plain-spoken people. What would the world do without plenty of

nonsense?" rejoined Rosette skilfully fencing; yet all the time longing for help, and feeling as if she had a mine under her feet which might at any moment explode. There was another pause, and then Maitland spoke.

" You know what I mean. I dislike untruth of any sort. I don't like to disbelieve anyone—much less to think that my sister," she said slowly, with a little compunction, " should share in an untruth by not contradicting it. But I don't want to be hard on you, or to force your confidence. It will be all right when you are married to Randal," she added with a little sigh, speaking as if she were thinking aloud.

" Married to Randal? I don't know that I shall ever be married to anyone. I have seen so many people who like me, that it really becomes quite troublesome to decide," protested Rosette, with a sudden change of front.

" Rosie—you grieve me," was the answer in a low voice. " You cannot pos-

sibly be in earnest, you cannot mean what you say."

"Yes, I 'grieve' you—I shock you, I daresay, if you were to tell the truth. What expressions you use?" she continued, with a saucy little toss of her head and raising her pretty eyebrows, as she added defiantly :

"Well, and if I *am* 'engaged' to Randal—'engaged,' that is your favourite expression, as if I were manacled to a man, and could just be allowed to trot out to the length of my chain, rattling it after me like the prisoner of Chillon—how can I help it? I took pity on him and consoled him. What else could I do? It is one of the privileges of women to be allowed to change their minds."

"But when you know that he loves you?"

"Very likely—and so have others loved me—there is nothing very odd in that."

"But when he is worthy of your love, when he has merits, talents, warm affec-

tions, good looks, sufficient money, everything you can want, and when you have promised to marry him."

"It is no good harping on that string, and it's no good for me to try to explain it to *you*. I might talk myself out of breath, and still it would be no good. I am different from you, of course I know that. We were born under opposite stars, and brought up in such different ways."

"Rosette, you don't mean it!" pleaded Maitland, in despair, and remembering how her sister had told her long ago that she had found out she had exceptional power. The fatal certainty of her own beauty had come to the girl sufficiently early, and she looked upon herself as a thing that ought not to have a vulgar price set on it. The audacious naïvité of Rosette's boasting, when she was scarcely more than a child, recurred to her memory, and made her feel alarmed. She remembered how she had once said to her, remonstrating,

"But it makes all the difference. We have nothing to do with nymphs and goddesses in this age of ours; the days are past when men made war with each other for the fine eyes of fair women. A pretty girl now is simply a pretty girl." She did not recur to the subject, but answered gravely,

"Really, these excuses do appear trivial. And what do they mean? it is all a mystery. I cannot bear mysteries; *do* try to be honest with me. I do not trust Mr. De Lafarges—if that is the difficulty which stands between us—I have more than once suspected it, and if he has been pleading his superiority—his birth, do not trust him for a moment. It is not only the religion that is wanting to him, though I have a keen recollection of that, but the tremendous nothings which he is always uttering; his cynicisms, his faithlessness. And how do you know he is not an adventürer? Oh, darling, do not trust him. He is not only not good enough for you, but not good

enough for any honest woman, depend upon it, he is not to be trusted. I should be oppressed with shame at the bare idea of your complicity with him."

She raised her voice in such eloquent entreaty, her eyes were so full of tenderness, sorrow and pity, that for the moment strength won a victory over weakness; and overcome by a revulsion of feeling, the frightened girl threw her arms round her neck, and began to sob quite pitifully.

"Don't, I can't bear it," she said; "don't say such things, what right have you to suspect me of having to do with that man? you are very hard to me. I think life altogether is dreary work just now."

Maitland's motherly heart relented at once. She had been resolved to convict her sister, to wrestle with her, and to tell her she could not endure all this beating about the bush. But when the hot tears began to fall on her neck, and when

Rosette, like a very Niobe in the abandonment of her grief, continued to sob in utter despair and misery : " You are cruel—very cruel—I never knew anyone so cruel before. I wish I were a hundred miles away from this terrible place I wish I had never come to it ; " or all in the same breath, " I wish I had never left you to go to a different school, I should have been different from what I am, then, and you would have helped me out of my scrapes." Maitland's resolution suddenly failed. It seemed so like " breaking a butterfly " to tell the girl she was vain, self-willed, and illogical, and so terribly like boasting, to recapitulate, as she had intended to do, the various sacrifices which, since her childhood, she had made for Rosette's happiness ; that she had perforce to make herself content with contradictory assertions, and misleading protests which had a grain of truth in them, and a strange admixture of falsehood. Still she was far from being content.

“My doubt has been a true one. There has been something very wrong—though it has not gone so far yet as to prevent me from stopping it; and stop it I must and will, at all risks—at all hazards,” she said to herself, the next morning, when, after a night of broken sleep, during which Rosette had been slumbering the undisturbed slumber of a tired child, she rose, determined to take some decisive step, whatever it might cost her. By ten o’clock, after she had supplied her father with books and writing-paper, and settled Steenie in the garden, to amuse himself by scattering crumbs to a whole bevy of sparrows, she tied on the old-fashioned hat which was always offending Rosette’s prejudices, and went steadily up the avenue in the direction of Caerwyn. It was a July morning, already hot, with a buzzing of drowsy flies, and a murmur of the warm wind which always stirred even in Summer, a harbinger of the cold equinoctial gales, which later on

in the season would scorch and shrivel the tall ferns which were still throwing out fresh fronds, and carry away the last sere leaves from the few oaks and beech trees. The cattle were lazily herded together down by the water, and the sheep on the hills had retreated to the shadow of overhanging rocks. But Maitland noticed none of these things, as she walked on with hurried step, occasionally stumbling as she walked as if she were afflicted with sudden blindness, for the little stones which tripped her up were as hidden from her as if she had been enveloped in a thick fog.

During the past hours of the sleepless night, many projects had occurred to her, many little well-laid schemes by which she might baffle De Lafarges. But she had dismissed them all in turn, as being unworthy of her.

Any act by which she might triumph over him, which was not an open and straightforward act, revolted her as if it

would lower her to his level. She had thought of going to Mr. Stanton, and of attempting to arouse his fears, but she dreaded to do so, since her fancy represented Randal's present unsuspicious carelessness as the result of his confidence in his friend. Her very ignorance of the world, in the isolated life which she led, made her exaggerate the danger of bringing the two men into collision, and made her consider the present calm as a lull which might at any time cease, and break into a storm of the fiercest jealousy. She walked up and down for some time on the path which led to Caerwyn—a narrow path which wound between the ferns and underwood—sick at heart, and very anxious, and even feeling a little ashamed of what she was proposing to do, but by no means shaken in her resolve, though her ideas were rather hazy about the catastrophe she anticipated.

“ So long as I do not offend against honour or honesty, it does not matter

how it *looks*," she tried to say to herself. Yet she grew paler and paler, with very white lips as she saw De Lafarges coming towards her, when it was near twelve o'clock. He raised his hat and was passing her, but she stood before him in the path, arresting his progress with that look of resolve on her pale face. A tiny, delicate little woman she appeared as she stood there, so fragile and so small that he felt as if a breath of wind might have swept her out of his way, and as if he could have crushed her with his fingers. And yet, as he noticed the decided mouth, the eager twitching of the hands, the great forehead and clear eyes, he stood a little in awe of her.

He laughed at her persistency, but he had no thought of being discourteous to her. He had spoken truly when he said that she was a new type of womanhood to him. He had been used to gliding, caressing women, loaded with fine feathers, soft swansdown, and sparkling jewellery;

yielding women accustomed to pleasure, or self-willed beautiful women, not over-hampered by conscientious scruples; “little heathens,” as on more than one occasion he had playfully called them. But a woman so terribly in earnest, so ready to sacrifice herself for those she loved, and so anxious to do right, was a new experience to him. The pretty legends of the old saints, which had once touched his boyish fancy, occurred again to his memory, and he admitted that he rather liked women to have their “gentle superstitions.” In fact he could have forgiven Maitland for everything but her intellectual superiority, which on more than one occasion had galled and irritated him.

He laughed at her attempt to interfere with his supremacy, as he had laughed at her for daring to break a lance with him in argument, yet he allowed her to stop him, though even then he thought with a certain amount of annoyance,

“These blue-stockings must always have their fingers in every pie. The world will come to an end if the sex is to be educated.”

“You are a philosopher of the Peripatetic school,” he said, with a light laugh. “The sun is burning in this walk. Why not avoid the midday heat?”

Was it hot? She felt as if a dry east-wind were choking her parched throat. A slight shiver ran through her frame, but she forced herself to answer,

“Mr. De Lafarges, are you keeping the promise you made to me the other day?”

He raised his eyebrows, and said, smiling down at her.

“I was not aware of any promise, but far be it from me to contradict a lady, even though that lady were absolute and autocratic, but if *you* were tyrannical the fetters you would use would be silken ones.”

She repressed a gesture of disgust, but

looked at him fixedly, as if to tell him that a woman of her sort could not bear familiarity from a man like him, as she tried to answer quietly,

“ Such language is only vague and sentimental.”

“ *Is it?*” he asked, observing the signs of agitation beneath her assumed calmness, and thinking it would be possible to extinguish her very neatly. “ *Is it?* I did not know it, then all chivalry is false sentiment.”

“ Chivalry!” she said, raising her sad sweet face to him, and looking at him with earnest eyes, knowing that she had no need of circumlocution or skilfulness, but venturing straight into the very heart of the battle. “ Chivalry is too noble a word for any man to use lightly. Truth is the soul of chivalry, for does it not pre-suppose honour and honesty?”

His nostrils dilated, his forehead contracted a little as she continued, though

her heart beat as if it would suffocate her.

“I did not for a moment think in my last interview with you, that you would persist in a course of conduct towards your friend, and a motherless girl, which anyone who understood it would call ungenerous and unkind. Still less did I think that you would condescend to a subterfuge, and that you would not even have the moral courage to do a wrong openly.”

He made a gesture as if to interrupt her, and there was silence for a moment or two during which he tried to control himself, and she pressed her hand over her heart, as if to still the violence of its beating.

Then he said in a low voice,

“I cannot allow myself to be insulted even by a lady. That last reproach is delicate, but I must justify myself. Is it to be war to the knife—between us?”

She was less afraid of him at that moment than she had been before. She forced her feelings to give way to her implacable will, and looked at him calmly, as she answered,

“Be reasonable! I appeal to *you* to help me in my attempt to help my sister.”

“Help her,” he said, a little hoarsely; “I would give my life for her.”

“So you feel at *this* moment,” rejoined Maitland, quite quietly. “Have you not felt so a good many times before? It is easy to talk of bearing death when it seems remote to us.”

He looked more annoyed than he had done before, and let himself answer with a touch of temper,

“So you think it right to make a mock of love. I know there are cold-blooded ascetic people who turn these things into jest. I used to do so once myself.”

Self-possessed as she was, her brow

flushed with sudden feeling, as she answered, "On the contrary, I look upon such love as the only perfect ideal left to us in a world full of evil. If I make a mock at anything, it is at the secrecy and the plotting which can taint an innocent affection which sin has left untainted."

"You do?" he said, with a little irony, thinking how odd and stiff she was, and yet what noble feelings she could show beneath the stiffness of her answers, and how tiresome it was he could not make her lose her self-command.

"Well, and supposing I have to blame myself a little for having been hurried into a premature avowal of such a love—and supposing I am only waiting for a turn of the tide that when I can take it, like a bold swimmer, I may make an open acknowledgment of the state of the case—is it possible that you will betray me? deliberately and cruelly, especially when the love is returned by your sister?"

“She is not in love with you. She may think she is, or you may frighten her into thinking it,” answered Maitland, in a tone calculated to produce utter exasperation.

It was the climax, and his pent-up passion would no longer be restrained. He came nearer to her and tried to speak, but what he would have said remained always a matter of surmise, for at that moment they were interrupted by the sound of an advancing footstep, and in another instant James Moorcroft came upon them suddenly, as he turned the corner of the footpath. He stood still when he saw them, uncertain of whether he should retreat or advance. He felt as if his senses were misleading him. Could it be Maitland, who was allowing this stranger to touch her, and who had chosen to be alone with him in close converse in this solitary place? The whole position was so little like that of a quiet reasonable girl, who had nothing

to do with flirtations or incipient love-making—that it seemed as if his eyesight must be playing him false. James Moorcroft was but human, and it was hardly strange if he was conscious of a swift sudden pang of distrustful jealousy. But the pang was quickly over. He remembered Maitland's firm, uncompromising rectitude. He recalled the time when he had seen her weeping and praying when she thought herself alone in the little church, and when he had guessed truly that the burden of her prayer had been, "Oh, my God, let me be content if I have only Thee!" And remembering, he believed in her, and tried to pass her, lifting his hat with a brotherly smile. And though at the same moment Paul de Lafarges took the opportunity of excusing himself from further conversation, and retreated, leaving them together, and though Maitland said, when the curate offered to see her to her home. "I would rather go

alone—I know my way;” the suspicion had been once for all dismissed from his mind.

CHAPTER IX.

ON the following day Maitland was overcome by a nervous attack which confined her to her bed.

She was a true woman—strong and energetic in the hour of danger, feeble and exhausted when the necessity for immediate action had passed, and her bodily ailments were generally reflections from her mind. That which was strongest had dominion over her for the time, and pulled down her failing flesh. Paul, who heard of her unusual indisposition, felt that nothing more fortunate could have happened at this crisis.

“Let them talk as they may about the equality of the sexes,” he thought to himself with a triumphant smile. “If it were merely a question of physical constitution, the woman must always be inferior to the man. I should like to see the woman who could match me in a struggle of wills.”

He was so determined to outwit Maitland, and felt it would be so easy to do so, that he could not help taking a good deal of credit to himself for the fact that his intentions were, as he thought, fair and honourable. He took no pleasure in wrong for the mere sake of wrong, but it would have seemed to him a superfluous exercise of charity towards Randal Stanton to abstain from plucking the fruit which hung temptingly ready to hand.

He was even for the first time in his life inclined to be romantic. For Rosette had been the first pretty girl for whom he really cared. He was quite astonished at the great passionate desire which surged up.

within him, to call this English girl his wife. And as to being hampered by that conscience which he looked upon as the development of the social instinct, he considered that the figment of such a conscience was quite overbalanced in this case, by the necessity of caring for Self, which was a part of the law of Nature. If he was intending to step into another man's shoes, whilst he was enjoying his hospitality, and abusing his confidence, he also recollects that he had placed that man under one of the greatest possible obligations to himself, and contemplated paying himself the debt, as if it were a matter of pounds, shillings, and pence. "The fellow ought to be obliged to me for letting him off so easily. And as to the nymph, Egeria, she will hear that I can make her sister happy," he thought, as he met Rosette by appointment that morning, well satisfied with himself and his magnanimous intentions. The girl had not ventured to refuse to come to

him, all the more because there was nothing underhand in the meeting, which was appointed openly, in one of the fields at the back of her father's house —a field covered, before a late crop of hay, with a thick, flossy carpet of long grass.

“Randal will think it strange if he hears of my coming to you here,” she said in a faltering tone, as if she were half inclined to cry ; for since her last conversation with Maitland, she began to feel as if something dreadful from which she could not escape were hanging over her head.

“The sooner Randal learns to think nothing strange the better, both for his sake and for ours,” he answered decidedly, fastening his eyes upon her with a look which she, in vain, attempted to return with arrogance. A curious sensation came over her, obliterating all her former liking for him, sweeping away her desire after pleasure and finery.

"But *I*—I am engaged to Randal," she said, with a sudden gulp of resolution. "Why do you look at me as if I were your property?"

"Well—you *were* engaged to Randal," he said, continuing to look at her with imperturbable coolness, "but you will certainly never marry him—I don't see anything unnatural in that. Nothing happens in this world just as we expect it."

She knew that the decisive moment had come for her—the hour which she had lately begun to dread had struck, and cowardly before vague terrors, she was not brave enough to face real ones.

"How can you *prevent* my marrying Randal?" she said, turning paler, and looking him in the face; "if I break off my engagement it will break my father's heart. He was so glad, poor father, to think of having me quite close to him—and so was Maitland, and then Randal has money enough to help us. Let me tell

you all about it—the solemn promises that I made—the—”

“A confession? I do not ask for it—and would rather you do not make it.”

“But if my conscience tells me it is indispensable?”

“I differ from your conscience. Long stories of the past only make people miserable. I have stories of my own, if I were to repeat them they might make you unhappy, so I shall keep them to myself. There, don’t insist upon it,” he said, trying to take her hand. “When you are my wife it will be time enough to make confessions.”

Her hand was cold, and she tried to wrench it from him, saying,

“What does it mean—I don’t understand you—tell me that all this is a joke.”

The words died upon her lips, and he answered them laughing.

“It means that directly I set eyes on

you I vowed to make you my wife—and I am not the man to be balked in a vow of that sort."

The tide was closing in round her, and she began to look wildly for a path. She was naturally quick, though she was not intellectual, and had never cultivated her abilities; and her life at school and at her aunt's had sharpened her natural quickness. For the last week or two she had begun to suspect that Paul de Lafargues was a schemer, a clever plotter for what he willed, and now that the conclusion was forced upon her; that he meant to marry her against her will, she was overwhelmed with sudden terror. Life began to open the door of terrible mysteries to her, and she, with her easy swansdown nature, had a perfect horror of mysteries.

She hid her face in her hands, crushed with grief in appearance, and repeating in an accent of horror, "I cannot let you tell them—I could not bear for them to

hear of it—you think me bold and brave, capable of standing against a storm. But you altogether mistake me—you do not know that I am weak." She was very beautiful in her grief. Her great eyes, wet with tears, were more brilliant than he had ever seen them, fugitive colour appeared and disappeared on her cheeks, her voice had strange echoes in it, and her hands were wrung together.

Had her grief resulted from affection to him, he might have been merciful to her. He might have felt his strength forsake him as Samson's before Delilah. But her evident dread of him irritated him. He looked at her for a moment with disappointment; he was not yet capable of an act of disinterested generosity, but he devoured her with his eyes, hoping that he did not understand.

Then he said, speaking slowly, as he drew her under the shade of one of the large trees.

“If you behave like this we shall be noticed, and that is what you are afraid of. I had intended to brave the matter openly; but if you are so frightened about it, there is no possible need to do so. You need not tell anybody. Yet our enemies are on the alert, and we must act without hesitation. I should not urge you if I did not know that the hour had struck for us—we are losing moments more precious than diamonds. See, I will manage things as carefully as if I were an English grandmother. This is Saturday—and on Monday morning at eight o’clock, suppose you find a carriage and a pair of horses—with a special licence you know, and a quick marriage to come after it—waiting for you at the clump of fir trees, where the road turns off towards Dolgelly. A maid will be ready to accompany you, and we will take the train to London at once. There now, don’t be frightened till you hear what I propose next. The thing is as easy as

possible. You and the maid can travel together in a ladies' carriage, and I will accompany you in the same train, or follow, if you prefer it. You will reach London with your attendant before the evening, and we can either be married there the next morning, or go direct to Paris for the ceremony—whichever pleases you."

So this was what he expected of her. It was for this reason he had pretended to pay her debts, and risked her life on another occasion that he might take the credit of saving it. He would marry her against her will, and he might, as her sister had told her, be "only an adventurer." In her inexperienced mind, this course of reasoning did not present itself logically, but she was not the less sure of it; though she lost herself here and there amongst the mazes, and then regained the thread. She was desperately angry with him. For the first time, it seemed to her possible that all the stories she had heard about his career at Monaco might

be true, and she tried to struggle once more, saying in a feeble voice,

“I cannot—in such a hurry—oh, you must leave me time.”

He saw the look of half-aversion in her face, and involuntarily tightened his lips, as he answered,

“You forget—the letters.”

“Ah, the letters that I was obliged to write to you about the money you paid for me, I recollect. I thought there was no harm in writing them—I couldn’t well prevent it. And you know you returned them all to me, every one of them.”

“I returned them,” he said; “of course I returned them as you wished it;” and then his look which was generally so gentle and caressing, became full of menace, as he added slowly, “but I was not a simpleton, of course I retained copies.”

“*You retained copies!*” she said, her eyes opening to their widest extent, and then filling rapidly with hot indignant tears, as for the first time she compreh-

hended the nature of the man with whom she had been trifling. “ You did ! I can’t endure it ; ” and she recoiled from his touch, as he, recovering his own temper at this turn of the scale, seemed only to be amused by her childish consternation, and putting out his hand stroked a lock of her hair which had been loosened by the wind, as gently as if she had been a frightened bird.

She started from him as if he had tried to touch her with a knife.

“ Don’t ! how dare you touch me ?—why did you make me meet you here ? ” was her first petulant exclamation ; and then she stopped herself, remembering with a sinking heart that she had no right to fire up at his threats, and recognising the fact that she was helpless through her own inexperience, that her unwary feet were being caught in meshes which she did not understand, and that this man who baffled her was different from her—not of her age nor of her world.

Yet she made one more frantic effort to

be equal to him in skill, saying as scornfully as she could, with a saucy toss of her head,

“ You may have retained the copies, but at any rate you have not my writing, nobody will believe that the letters are written by *me*, even if you try to produce them in evidence against me.”

“ Will they not ?” he said, quietly. “ Then they must deny the evidence of their senses. I had a photographic copy made of each letter as you sent it. It is my habit to keep carefully preserved copies of these things. It is rather amusing to keep them, and sometimes may prove useful.”

She looked at him without answering, no longer in such a state of excitement that her words were likely to escape her without an effort of her will.

She began to feel as if she must obey him by an irresistible pressure. How could she resist a man who manœuvred to win her in this way ?—a man who was a successful gambler, she remembered it too late. Too late she would like to have

called upon Maitland for assistance. Her lips tried to frame the name, but her voice stopped in her throat. Only a rough sound was heard as she looked full of dread and misgiving at De Lafarges. Her natural cowardice assisted him, her dread of being the wife of such a schemer was overpowered by her greater dread of exposing herself to the possible anger of her father. To be disgraced at Llandyffryn by having the photographed letters shown to Randal, and her engagement broken off, to have lost both men by flirting with them, and then to be forced possibly to waste the best years of her existence at a place where she was not only sadly at a loss for amusement, but wofully in want of companions; to feel her life, health, and beauty wasting away, unfelt and unenjoyed, and then to be pointed out by the Llandyffryn matrons, and avoided as if she were poison—oh, it was not a prospect to be tolerated.

She was afraid—afraid of everything, and therefore she could not answer, but

stood listening stupidly to De Lafarges' arrangements, feeling crushed, poor child, unable to struggle any more, but with her old objection to anything that was tragical or out of the usual course of life, and a prey to the anguish of her injured pride. She had it not in her to be as Maitland would have been under similar circumstances, superb with indignation, her cheeks on fire and her eyes flashing. For there seemed nothing to be done but to take the easier course, answering with dreary composure, and even a little show of interest as Paul enlarged on their future happiness, and all the glories of a life in Paris.

That evening, and on the following Sunday, Maitland was startled by her sister's manner. Rosette tried the wildest talk, and told the wildest stories, and then relapsed into silent dejection and sadness. On the Saturday night she tried to play something on the old piano, which she called a "harpsichord," but

the notes danced before her eyes—she did not play, she made a noise. She went early to bed, and kept her room on the Sunday under pretence of a headache. Then for the first time, she attempted the “thinking out,” which is always so difficult for a woman whose perceptive faculties are more matured than the reflective. She remained for a little time in contemplation, and then gave up the effort which was so painful to her, since her conscience seemed to give her two different forms of advice.

“Stay,” it said; “you are not bad-hearted, and your going in this way will make your sister miserable. Your father is half out of his mind already, the doctors have said he is not to be crossed, and who knows but if you disappear in this sudden way—in such a way that he may even think you disgraced—but that the delirium which he has shown once or twice already, may return with fearful violence, and make it dangerous for your sister

and brother to live with him? Stay, for your own sake, for you fear the man who wishes you to marry him. He is neither handsome like Randal, nor pleasant to be with, and you have reason to think that he is wicked."

"Go," said the illogical voice, at the same moment; "for you will be rich, and proud of making such a match. You will have plenty of society, and the opportunity which you always wanted, of showing your own attractions, and making a figure in the world. You will live in such a round of pleasure, that you will not see much of your husband. And after all, you will love him as nearly every wife loves, in a quiet matter-of-fact way, and you know that if you were to live till Doomsday, you would never care enough about any man to pretend to love the ground he treads, and the air over his head, and all that nonsense. Go, for if you do not go, De Lafarges will ruthlessly expose you. He is very far from

jesting, and he will show the letters and then you cannot stay to be spoken against. After all, when you have married him, and the first awkward leap is over, you can send money back to your own relations; you can write and tell them it is all right, and they will see there is nothing to be frightened about. You will escape from a comfortless, dull, poverty-stricken home, to one that is wealthy, and smooth, and easy—nobody can find fault with you without being perfectly absurd." The last argument seemed conclusive, but when she sat down to write a farewell letter to Maitland, remaining for a long time with the pen balanced in her hand, thinking in vain of what she was to say, somehow its conclusiveness seemed suddenly to be destroyed.

"It's very strange," she thought suddenly, striking her hand on her breast, "very strange—I can't make it out. Just now I felt thoroughly convinced it was

right, and now something in my heart seems to tell me I'm wrong."

She remained for a long time with the pen still balanced in her hand, wondering if she were ill, for she felt as if she were falling into an abyss, in which the sensations she experienced were so inexplicable and painful that she only longed to reach the bottom. She gasped as if for air.

"I cannot help it," she cried, throwing down her pen; "I have no more business to marry De Lafarges than I have to kill myself. It will degrade me to marry him, now that he forces me to it. I had a queer dream last night, and it seemed to shape a prophecy—I felt as if I were lying on the floor, and he held me down with his knee upon me, so that he would not let me move. I will not think of my dream. Oh, if Maitland could help me! if she were merry and like myself. But no—she cannot understand me—she is so dreadfully good. Whatever our souls are made of—hers and mine—they are as

different from each other—as sunlight from moonlight. And now I am in the grasp of this man, and I must make the best of it. I always looked on the bright side; it is better to laugh than to cry—and I mean to laugh still, whatever happens to me. Though De Lafarges is my fate—and I—I cannot escape from it."

From this moment she was without any hope of succour, because she was lost in her own eyes.

She could no longer endure the solitude in which she had to cheat her uncomfortable conscience, but crept back to the little sitting room, where she was too restless to be able to hold her tongue.

Long afterwards Maitland remembered her unusual excitement, as she rattled on in the feverish confusion of her talk, wresting subjects out of their relative connection with each other, and then dropping them as soon as she had taken them up—making mistakes and false quo-

tations, and then laughing at her blunders, and calling herself Mrs. Malaprop—or relapsing into fits of silence which nobody could understand.

* * * *

On the Monday morning early, at the time appointed, De Lafarges was waiting impatiently by the clump of fir-trees.

No one was there—he had arrived first at the trysting-place, and was kept long enough in suspense to have time to reflect. The reflections were scarcely pleasant ones, for he had been up long before daybreak, and had reflected too much to please him during a night clear and limpid, in which the brilliancy of the stars had paled, and the disk of the moon could clearly be seen over the distant peak of Snowdon. The night had preached to him, and he was weary of its preaching. He was tired, ill at ease, and in no humour for further waiting.

“She is playing with me,” he thought, grinding his teeth with anger; “she is

treating me like an imbecile—an idiot."

His heart had begun to beat fast and loud. A strange excitement, which was half of rage, sent the blood to his brain; and he was conscious of a throbbing of the temples.

At the same moment, he heard the branches of the fir-trees crack, then there was a furtive, hesitating footstep, followed by an apparition which glided amongst the trees. It was pale in the daylight, with a long dress of floating folds, and fair, with a milk-white fairness, which contrasted strikingly with the burnished hair. Yet all the poetry had fled, and Rosette, who stood before him, shaking from head to foot from the nervous terrors of her journey, with a trembling that was like the fluttering of a little bird, shrank from him when he tried to touch her, and muttered something indistinct about creeping round the back way for fear of being followed. She did not look at him as she spoke, for the

sight of him reminded her that she had allowed herself to be coerced against her instincts, and the momentary glance she had ventured to take at him added to her terror. Yesterday, his had been the face of a tolerably good-looking man. But she had never seen him under the present aspect, with his thick brows so knitted together, that instead of rising into natural arches they sank in the middle, with dark eyes buried beneath them which seemed to scowl at her with anger, and surly wrinkles on his cheeks.

“ You had very nearly done for us both.”

“ I cannot help it,” she answered with a little hysterical laugh; “ somebody was following, I am quite sure of it.”

“ Then there’s not a moment to be lost. We’ve missed the train as it is;” he said, taking her hand rather impatiently to urge her into the carriage, shutting the door with a sudden slam, and seating himself by the side of the driver on the box.

She could scarcely help repeating the wild unnatural laugh, as she yielded without resistance, and was thrust into the carriage. Her nerves had been so unusually excited, that, like a bow which is strung too tightly, they vibrated without her will. It was only a cowardly little protest. He recognised its meaning, and the meaning irritated him.

He knew that she felt it would be useless to resist, and that the fact of her marriage with him would be accepted without a struggle. He had all the confidence of domination, and was satisfied that he held her with bit and bridle. He had laid his plans cleverly, and he had won as he had intended, but what was he to reap from the supposed success?

He began for the first time to think of the possibility of having tortured the small amount of heart which she possessed, so that the experiment might end in losing it for ever.

CHAPTER X.

ON the following morning, Maitland, suspecting nothing amiss, was up earlier than usual, and was busily engaged, after a hurried breakfast, with altering and continuing one of the joint literary productions which had been commenced by her father.

She had taken her work into the open air, and wrote and corrected with the rapidity of a vigorous thinker. The essay was intended to be a biographical sketch, which Mr. Gathorne had overloaded with detail, and as the daughter

ventured on the necessary alterations she was thinking how the father would demur to her corrections, and how she would persuade him, in the apologetic tone which she always adopted, saying to him,

“I think that the historian, as well as the artist, must always preserve harmony and proportion. There are certain hazy and mysterious parts in every landscape, of which the uneducated observer might ask, ‘How would a painter represent that in all its details?’ and the painter would answer, ‘Simply by not attempting to represent the details at all.’”

To illustrate her comparison she looked around her at the sunlit landscape, with a peep through the branches of the trees at the glittering water in the distance, and the azure sky. The July morning was an unusually lovely one. And as the girl raised a face which was somewhat pale and studyworn, a chaffinch with

russet breast hopped close to her as if expectant of crumbs, and a gorgeous dragon-fly, which had wandered from a neighbouring brook, attracted her attention as it hovered over the crimson bells of some gladioli which a friend had given her to plant in the garden.

Maitland breathed a little sigh of full contentment as she completed her task, and returned to the house. She had seldom felt happier than she felt that morning, in tune with all the world, and only longing for Rosette to glide into the room as winning and merry as when she first came to Llandyffryn.

“No wonder she lost her spirits in our dull life,” she thought to herself, as she sat at her needlework, expectant of her sister, “but the cloud will pass when Randal’s friend leaves Wales. I should like Rosette to be as bright as when she first came to us, though I do not like the unnatural excitement she shows now. How could we expect her to show the

sober disenchantment of maturity? What would the world be without a little wholesome nonsense?"

Maitland herself, though disenchanted about some things which are supposed to make up the sum of human happiness, and very mature in her own eyes, felt as bright at that moment as if no cloud had ever darkened her own horizon. She had ceased to attach importance to the threatenings of the stranger, who had shown such a mysterious power in intimidating her father; and could even laugh to herself as she remembered how the grave old man smiled something like a stage father about his youngest daughter's approaching marriage, and tried to hide how he was languidly bored with Mr. Stanton.

But where was Rosette? It was nothing uncommon for her to be late at breakfast; but as ten o'clock struck her sister rose to look for her, thinking anxiously,

“ Could she have had any further assignation with De Lafarges ?”

Meanwhile a girl from Llandyffryn who had been out on an early errand, raced back open-mouthed, full of information.

“ Speak low, Nelly,” said Maitland, with a face as white as her collar. “ It must be all a mistake, don’t alarm the master.”

But Nelly was too much excited to speak in modulated tones. She insisted that she had noticed the gentleman ; “ that nobody could mistake ‘im,” and “ she’d ‘ave known the young lady anywhere, spite of the veil over her face.”

And when it proved that Rosette was not to be found, that she was nowhere in the house, and not in the garden, and that in her bedroom the drawers had been emptied, and all her little treasures had been overturned, a doubt at first, and then an overpowering certainty came to the elder sister’s mind.

For a few seconds she was stunned and frightened, with a face suddenly white and pinched, and then the whole truth flashed upon her. During those first moments of bewilderment, she called "Rosette" in imploring accents. She even ran out into the road, as if it would be possible for her to look miles away at the retreating carriage, and when all search proved to be useless, so that no trace could be discovered of the fugitive, she returned home, almost desperate.

The door of the cottage, as she neared it, was open ; and at first she was afraid to go in, knowing that her father was there. She had to contend against the weakness which urged her to go back, as she heard his voice threatening, imploring,

" Rosette, where is Rosette ? "

She tried to speak, but the words died in her throat. He staggered out, laid a heavy hand on her shoulder, and

repeated fiercely, "Where is Rosette?"

At that moment the frequent conviction that, however necessary she might be to the old man's comfort, he had never given her a tithe of the love which in his secret heart he lavished on Rosette, recurred to her without bitterness, and made her the more sorry for him.

"If I knew I would tell you," she said, trembling like a leaf shaken by the wind.

"You do know—you guess at least—somebody must know. For God's sake tell me what has happened!"

"Paul de Lafarges left yesterday night, or this morning early—I do not know exactly which, and they say that Rosette left with him;" she said, in a voice which did not seem to belong to herself.

"Oh, the miserable girl!" he commenced.

"Father, do not curse her. If

she left with him, he will marry her."

"*I do not curse her—she was cursed in her childhood, and the curse has lighted on her.*"

"Father, this is raving. As if a mysterious curse could hurt her. She is in God's hands. He will not fail us."

"She has disgraced us."

"No, it is no disgrace. We must make the best of the marriage. I only hope she may never repent of the course she has taken," said Maitland, whose motherly instinct roused her to defend her sister.

"Poor weak-minded girl—how could she trust to a man like De Lafarges?"

In his excitement Mr. Gathorne seemed to have recovered the energy of his youth. His eye was bright—his voice vibrated—his gestures were menacing.

"You suspected this," he cried. "Why did you not prevent her from going?"

“What could I do?” she asked, struck with the grim irony of his injustice to herself, and speaking in a low voice, which he scarcely heard.

“You could have told me your suspicion—you could have exerted your authority—we could have locked her in her room.”

“You did not tell me to use *force*. I am not a policeman!”

“What will become of her?” he said, wringing his hands; and it was in vain that Maitland repeated he was “exaggerating the calamity.”

He brought his clenched fist on the table, and then sank helplessly into a chair, covering his face with his hands, and giving himself up to his dismal thoughts.

“I wash my hands of her,” he said, when Maitland tried to speak to him, and he remained for hours in that attitude, as if life could have no further interest for him. The sudden energy had been

manifested but for a little while, and when it left him he was more exhausted than before, more than ever a very feeble, childish, broken down old man. That respectability, which is the Englishman's fetish, and which he flattered himself he still preserved in spite of his enemy's efforts to deprive him of it, had been outraged by the critical step which his daughter had taken. He insisted on repeating that he ought to have known De Lafarges to be a "bad man," that he ought to have checked Rosette's vanity before it brought her to this pass, and for a while the damaged respectability seemed to be the one idea left to him. But that evening they received a letter which the fugitive posted from Dolgelly. A letter which reassured them both, though it was outrageously flowery, and trisyllabic to the extent of rendering its meaning somewhat hard to decipher. It was accompanied by one from De Lafarges, and it contained, beneath

the ornamental verbiage, a more business-like statement of facts than could have been expected from Rosette.

Book III.

CHAPTER I.

“ **A**t last you are mine—mine entirely, no lovers and no interfering sisters can step between us any more;” said De Lafarges, after the double service which had been performed quietly, according to his promise, at the Protestant, and one of the Roman Catholic churches at Dieppe—a sort of compromise between London and Paris.

He looked at the wedding-ring which he had slipped upon her finger, with no attempt to hide his triumphant sense of ownership. She resented the sort of

exultation she discerned in him, and if he had expected much sentiment from his bride, he must have been disappointed. But he was in no humour to complain. Rosette, with flushed face, looked prettier than ever, and though he wished to make his wife properly subservient to his will, the time for claiming obedience had not yet arrived ; her dainty little foot was still treading on his heart. Her beauty covered everything to him just then. He had studied her disposition, and he knew perfectly well that it would be easy to charm away her dawning distrust by surrounding her with the beautiful things which she loved. And it proved as he expected. At the first sight of Paris her gravity was thawing and vanishing in the sunshine.

He took her to his house in the Rue de l'Université. A narrow court surrounded it, and it would have been bold to give the name of garden to some damp earth behind it. But the pavement of the vestibule was inlaid with handsome

tiles, and the palisade of the staircase was of fine oak carving.

“The Parisian home of my ancestors,” said Paul, with an inflated manner, which occasionally betrayed the Frenchman, but from which he generally abstained. Rosette did not observe the untruthfulness of the manner; she was too delighted with the magnificence of the reception-rooms. Every article of furniture had its definite art-value, and though many of these articles were said to have disappeared under the reign of Paul de Lafarge, collections of ivory, bronzes, and old china still remained. Heavy crimson velvet portières divided the apartments, and Rosette was served that night with sparkling crystal, white damask, and fresh flowers; things which she speedily learnt to value as her daily bread.

Her husband did not tell her any particulars about his property. For a time he was determined that she should enjoy the pleasures of Paris the Syren—with

its historical glories of the past, and its gay splendour of the present ; its Bois de Boulogne, its Louvre, its Palais Royal, and its gardens. On the first day he took her to the *magasins* to choose herself fresh toilettes, and he speedily found that he could not have adopted a better plan for charming away regrets. She had such a sincere and naïve pleasure in adorning herself, that he could not help laughing at it. He had some difficulty to get her to choose the quieter shades of colour, and to prevent her from deciding on some wonderful little *confections* in the shape of hats and bonnets, which would make every one turn round to look at her when she wore them on her pretty head.

“ You think me very silly,” she said ; and he protested that he did not.

“ Then you think me extravagant ? ”

“ I am not a millionaire,” he answered lightly, “ but the deluge has not come yet, and meanwhile I have plenty for both of us.”

She only understood the pleasant part of his speech, and did not trouble herself to decipher the rest of it.

“I am no Spartan,” she answered. “I never pretended to be one, and as the world is full of good things, I may as well take my share of them. I think you will find,” she added, with a coquettish little toss of her head, “that you have a wife who knows how to spend.”

Even that speech did not make him lose his presence of mind. It was so unnatural to see Rosette’s face look pale and startled as it had looked on the morning of her flight from Llandyffryn, that at present he had no thought of contradicting her in anything which could restore the roses and dimples to her cheeks.

His voice had a ring of triumph in it, as he answered her in her own vein.

“Did I not tell you that you had no idea what the meaning of life was in Wales?”

They afterwards wandered beneath the cool gloom of the horse-chestnut trees in the Tuileries gardens, past the statues and vases, and the sparkling fountains. The sun was sinking, and bathing the Seine in its glorious colour as if there were a fire on its banks, as they returned home at the close of Rosette's first day in Paris.

CHAPTER II.

ALL evenings were not like the first. After a little while it appeared that Paul was often mysteriously occupied, and that the house was sometimes invaded by friends to whom he did not think fit to introduce his wife, who was expected on those occasions to remain in her own apartments.

But this was only for a little while. Rosette was easily mollified by the assurance that as soon as the season commenced again in Paris, her nights should be passed in amusement, as her days were now in sight-seeing.

Paris wore its usual Summer aspect, and she did not find it dull by any means, though the former season was over. The city was still gay enough, although its gaiety differed from the gaiety of the Winter or Spring. The true Parisian was seeking his pleasure in Summer resorts, but the foreigner and the provincial were taking their holiday in the city abandoned by the *beau monde*. The most beautiful equipages in the Bois were now owned by Americans, and ladies from Boston and New York were buying pictures and articles of virtu at fabulous prices.

Rosette enjoyed her unexpected freedom. She did not miss her husband when she was accompanied by her maid, and when she could choose bijouterie and other pretty things at the seductive Palais Royal. Indeed, Paul's absence was often a relief. For the shadow was sometimes on his face, and the pallor on his cheeks, whilst the glimpses which she had caught of a

few of his friends had somewhat alarmed her.

They sang noisy songs downstairs, and seemed (from the maid's account) to amuse themselves with cards, as Rosette sipped her coffee and read her novels, clad daintily, in her boudoir. She was not, as she said, "romantic," and she liked her idleness with its comforts, and the prospect of the novelties of the approaching season. She wrote to Maitland, occasionally, wonderful eulogiums of her life in Paris. But writing in the flowery style which did not come naturally to her, cost her a good deal of trouble, and she preferred to amuse herself with the novels.

Paul was wonderfully pleased with her at this crisis. In his leisure hours he laid himself out for her amusement, telling himself that it was a good thing to try to please her. She always rewarded him by little exclamations of delight. All her little coquettices came back to

her, and she forgot her transient dread of him. The languid flow of spirits which had never been natural to her, was now associated in her mind with the chronic shortness of money and dull routine at Llandyffryn. Poverty and she had been so long acquainted, that she did not know how to spend enough. The habits which were "ingrain" in her, began to shew themselves, and her husband who, when he saw her in a new evening dress, said, "you little witch! what spell have you been using?" had no suspicion of the expensive account which she was running up at her milliner's.

In the drawing-room, fresh looking-glasses began to appear with satin chairs and gilded tables, fresh photographs of herself in rococo frames, and a new becoming, half-sleepy light was introduced by the aid of fresh window-hangings. Paul began to expostulate. He talked again of the "deluge," and then comforted himself by remembering it was

something to keep Rosette amused. He liked to see her clapping her hands, and her eyes sparkling as she arranged flowers in the vases, and settled the articles of furniture to her liking. He liked to see her evident pleasure at the admiration which she attracted as she drove beside him in the Bois de Boulogne—one of the prettiest women in the drive. It would have been absurd to despise her for the fact that these things made her young heart beat—so that gladness was her prevailing feeling. The nature which was as yet so immature and undeveloped, amused him as a study, and he thought how easy it would be at any time to put his own stamp on it. He could as yet afford to laugh at her when she said in answer to his question : “ How would she like to go back again to the cottage at Llandyffryn ? ”

“ Oh, the life that my sister leads was never made for *me*. I should hate going about to visit poor people as she does—

and fancy sitting up late to fag with one's pen! I should never have married if I had had to put buttons on my husband's shirts, or to darn his socks, for instance."

"But supposing you had loved your husband."

"I should never have loved a poor country bumpkin. I can get on very comfortably without *that* sort of love. I have never troubled myself much about it. You and I understand each other well, *mon ami*," she added, seeing by the darkening of his face that she had made some mistake by her speech, "and you can leave me for hours without being sentimental about me."

He looked silently at her for some seconds, and then he replied,

"That sort of philosophy can't really please you. It does not please the majority of women. It is all very well for the present, but—*après*?"

"*Après*? I never think about it," she

answered indifferently. "I suppose I am like the grasshopper in the fable, only asking to sing all the Summer, and never troubling about the frost and the snow."

"But supposing," he said recklessly determined to try her, "that some terrible misfortune came upon you, as it comes upon many women in this great city, who never look forward to the future, any more than you do?"

"What do they do then?" she asked, opening her large eyes.

"Drown themselves, or something of the kind."

"I am very sorry for them."

"*Bast!*" he said with an indifferent gesture, "it is no use for us to shed tears over them. There are numbers of poor creatures in Paris who never think of the morrow—they sport like ephemerides in the sunshine, laughing to-day, and gone to-morrow; and if people were to begin to shed tears over them, the Seine would

overflow its banks—we should have inundations."

The conversation dropped, but it revived her old dread of him. She liked to see her husband now and then, but she was not particularly fond of his sole company.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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